

ON THE OLD FRONTIER



by

WILLIAM O. STODDARD



Dear

mother

Grandfather

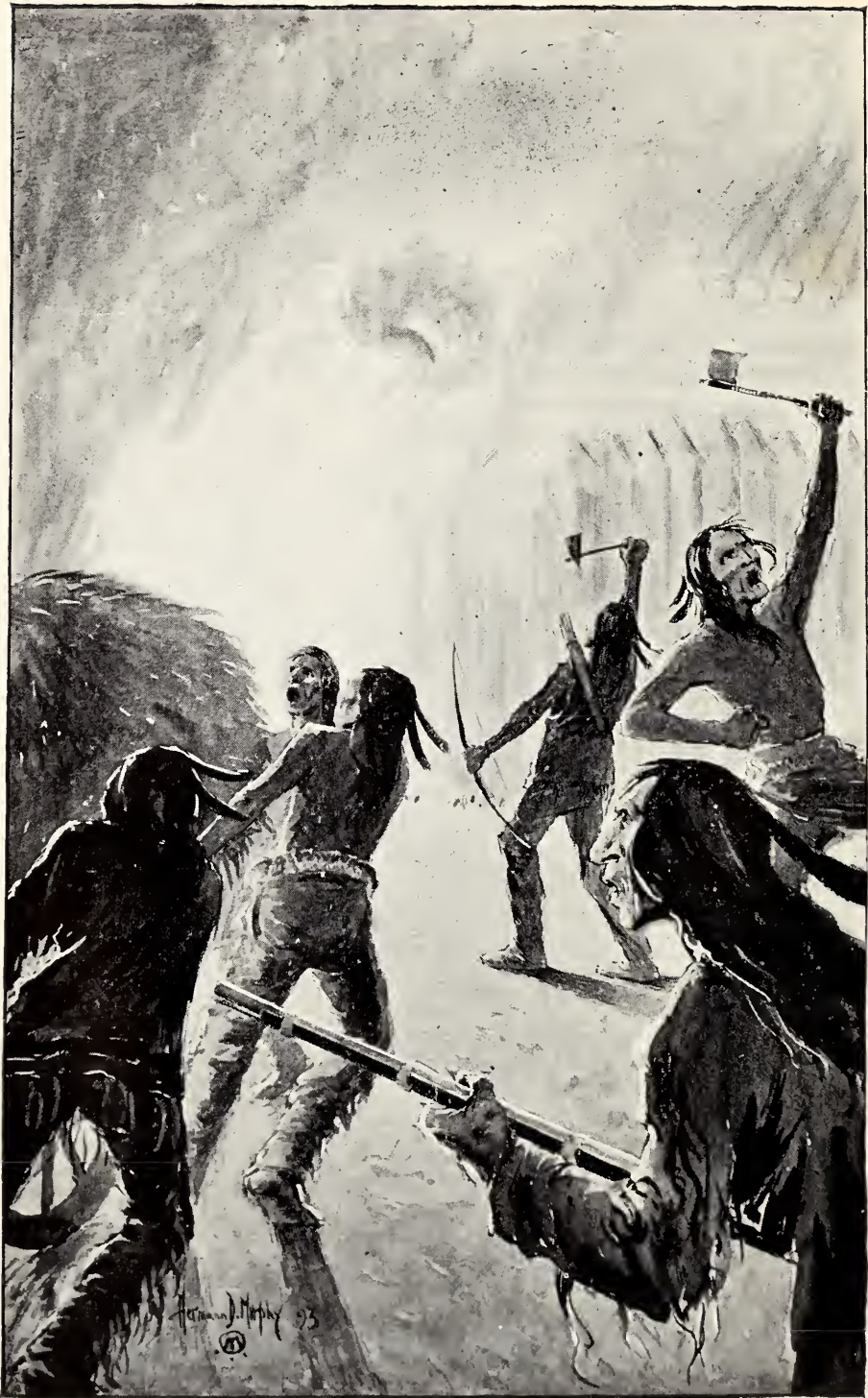
William C. Johnson

Christmas, 1923.



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Burning the palisades.

ON THE OLD FRONTIER

OR

THE LAST RAID OF THE IROQUOIS

BY

WILLIAM O. STODDARD

AUTHOR OF CROWDED OUT O' CROFIELD, LITTLE SMOKE,
THE BATTLE OF NEW YORK, ETC.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. D. MURPHY

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P R E F A C E .

It is not easy for an American of the present day to form a correct idea of the real life of the men and women, boys and girls, of the time chosen for this story. Too plain a presentation of The Old Frontier would probably be found altogether too terrible for use in fiction. Only enough has therefore been pictured to indicate the nature of the materials which ought not to be presented.

Care has been taken to preserve historical accuracies in outline, and to explain the cause and nature of "the last raid of the Iroquois," before their war strength and their remarkable confederacy itself were broken forever. The story is a fiction founded on fact, with a hope that it may have a permanent value. The author has wished that his readers may obtain, if possible, somewhat the same perception of frontier life that he did, when in his own boyhood he sat and listened

to the traditions of the pioneers, his kinsfolk and neighbors; or when, as boy or man, he inspected old log houses, old forts, Indian battle grounds, canoes, implements, weapons—for he has himself worn moccasins and carried a rifle. His first weapon was a bow and arrows made for him by an Onondaga Indian, for he was born and brought up within a few miles of the Council House where once burned the Sacred Brand of the Iroquois. Perhaps this may account in part for the deep interest he has taken in all red men, East or West, and for a desire that both they and the settlers who swept them from their hunting grounds should be better understood.

A great many people have written and printed "Indian stories" in which there were no recognizable Indians, and frontiersmen of whom he can at least say that he never met them anywhere. While this story is not of the redmen, but rather of the white settlers, it has been constructed with conscientious preparation and with an intention of presenting the reality, which is the only worthy aim of fiction.

W. O. S.

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ON THE OLD FRONTIER.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE WOODS.



HOW could a girl be so very pretty in such a skimp-skirted, awkwardly fashioned dress, bareheaded and barefooted?

How? Because the very defects of the dress itself seemed to bring out the fact that it contained all the homeliness to be seen. Besides, the warm, butternut tint of its homespun woollen agreed perfectly with the rich, auburn brown of a toss of curls upon which the autumn sun was shining through a rift in the tall forest trees. He had smiled upon her face before, as the tan and a few freckles witnessed, but there was a kind of condensed sunshine under them in the form of rosy good health.

There was color, color, everywhere; for the brilliant maples had set the example, and the elms had followed, and then the beeches, and now even the oaks and the hickories testified to the lingering chestnuts that the leaf-painting frosts had come. It was time, too, they said, for the burrs to open and let fall the harvest for which so many beautiful wild creatures were waiting.

The grand old forest was in all its glory of ripe beauty, therefore, but its burly giants had retreated from the spot where the girl was standing. They had left an open space of at least an acre, and she was in the eastern edge of it. Doubtless the trees had given up that place, in common consent, that there might be a chance for a growth of grass; and the grass, indeed, had grown, but a great intrusive thicket of sumac bushes had walked out into the middle of it and settled there, and now they also were all one glow of dark, blood-crimson.

She stood very still, for she was evidently listening intently.

Silence—silence; but through all the silence of a forest there are always waves and currents of soft-

ened sound. Not that the trees are always whispering, or that the wind is always busy, but that always, everywhere, something or other is speaking.

A woodchuck came to the mouth of her burrow and looked out, and then warned her family downstairs not to come up. A brace of raccoons peered around the end of a fallen trunk, and then galloped away as if an errand hurried them. In every direction came the click of dropping beechnuts and the heavier spat of hickory nuts or the small thud of butternuts. Any forest dweller can tell by the sound what kind of nut is falling. Perhaps that was the meaning of the chattering remarks made by the pair of red squirrels in the nearest beech-tree, after chasing out of it a black squirrel and a gray, with their accustomed clannish jealousy.

“She must be out this way somewhere,” said the girl, in a very clear, cheerful-sounding voice. “What did she come so far for? Nannie! Co-Nan! Co-Nan! Co-Na-an!”

Whoever Nannie might be, no answer came from her, but there was one answer, or, perhaps, there were two. The first came from the thicket of sumac

bushes, for there was a sudden, sharp rustle among them, a pause in the rustling, and then, with a great bound, out sprang a splendid buck with branching horns.

“Oh!” exclaimed the girl. “Is n’t he a beauty!”

He had no idea of remaining to be admired, however, for away he dashed across the grassy open toward the sheltering shadows of the forest.

The shadows on the western side, behind whose trees the sun was going down, were very deep. The silence there had also seemed to be as deep, excepting only the hushed voices of the wilderness itself. Out of one dark cranny, however, hooded over with underbrush and vines, there came, as the buck sprang from his sumac covert, a croaking, harsh, guttural, almost sepulchral “Ugh!”

That was all. There was no following sound, and the girl evidently did not hear. It gave her no warning. She was not on the watch for hidden dangers, indeed, but now a large, hideous, bronze-colored, scalp-locked head was thrust cautiously forward, so that a pair of glittering black eyes could follow for a moment the graceful bounds of the

escaping deer. That was doubtless due to a born hunter's instinct, compelling him to stare at game even when out of reach, but the black eyes turned quickly toward the girl with a fierce and terrible expression. He seemed for a moment like a kind of human tomahawk lifting for a blow. Little would he, or such as he, have cared for the fairness or youth of the eager face that now was turning this way, that way, as she repeated, with all her voice:

“Co-Nan! Co-Nan!”

Her last shout had almost a plaintive sound in it, but as she put up her hand to her ear and listened her face suddenly brightened.

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle—she could hear it—the dull, coppery clank of a cow-bell.

“That 's Nannie!” exclaimed the girl triumphantly, while a pair of broad shoulders followed the watching head that they lifted above the thicket, and the fierce eyes began to look hungrily, wolfishly expectant.

At that moment a loud report, roaring rather than sharp, rang through the forest.

“Ugh!” again exclaimed the bronze-headed lurk-

er, as he drew back into the underbrush, like a turtle-head into a shell.

“Oh dear! What’s that?” exclaimed the girl, “I wonder if it’s Dan. He ought not to be out hunting again. He ought to be at school.”

The buck had been unwise to leave the red-tufted security of his sumac covert merely because a girl called for her cow to come home. She would not have harmed him, but the gorgeous autumn woods had perils in them for such splendid game as he. Hardly had his long, elastic leaps carried him a hundred yards beyond the forest margin before his keen perceptions told him of another presence, and he stood stock-still, while one could have counted five.

He could not really have feared the very benevolent-looking red cow, with the white blaze on her face, who had stopped her very bell to stand and look at him, but she seemed to absorb his attention for the moment, just when he should have been running his best. Not exactly behind the cow, but behind a tree near her, stood the danger, for a long, bell-muzzled barrel was pressed against the trunk of the tree and a pair of keen, dark, brilliant eyes first,

and then only one of them, was looking along the iron tube.

Click—flash—bang—a rush of flying lead, a great, convulsive bound of the smitten buck, a startled, shrill lowing from the red cow, and the young hunter shouted:

“Got him!” He was about to dash forward, but he checked himself.

A wary, thoughtful look chased away the flush of hunter’s enthusiasm from his bright, boyish face, and he remarked to himself:

“No, I won’t. After a gun’s fired, nowadays, the next thing is to load it before you stir a step. Buckshot again, I guess, but I shan’t get another buck. I’d hardly any idea of finding this one—not at this time o’ day and so near the settlement.”

Rapidly, carefully, he loaded his long, heavy gun, with a charge the size of which fully accounted for the instantaneous fall of the buck. He poured powder into the pan of the lock; picked the flint a little with the back of his pocket-knife; put down the thumb-piece; and then once more the somewhat clumsy weapon was ready for service. It was a

very different process from that of putting a copper cartridge into a modern breech-loader. All the while he had remained hidden behind the tree, almost as if there might be some danger of the dead buck shooting back at him. The cow had no such caution in her mind, however, for she plodded slowly forward toward the bit of natural clearing, and the clanking tinkle of her bell regularly answered the voices of the falling nuts and the frequent bark of the squirrels in the trees to their comrades on the ground. Nobody ever heard a squirrel bark on the ground, and no squirrel ever gave anybody the reason why.

“Co-Nan!” came again across the open from beyond the sumacs, but the girl was stepping forward now, with a step as light as that of any deer, and the cow’s vocal response may have meant:

“Here I am! I came with Dan van Lennep!” for it was somewhat protracted and explanatory in its tone.

“Ugh!” sounded a low, guttural growl in the western underbrush. “Kho-go-na-ga wait. Take red hair some other day. Ugh!”

He did not speak in English, but if he had done so he would have translated word for word, as all Indians do, fixing white men's words to the condensed form of their own speech. Very few of them ever master such things as tenses and particles, for they never had any at home.

He may have been meditating some savage purpose or other up to the moment when he heard the report of the gun, for his dark, sullen face wore a disappointed look and his right hand was playing with the handle of the long sheath-knife in his belt.

He wore no paint whatever, nor feathers, excepting a long black one, perhaps from a hawk's wing, in his scalp-lock. He was a tall, muscular fellow, and he was fairly well dressed, in soiled and weather-beaten buckskin, but his weapons did not include a gun. Whether from poverty or preference, he carried a long, strongly made bow, and the quiver at his back was full of flint-headed arrows. The tomahawk in his belt, however, was of steel, and although it seemed a light-weight, long-handled affair, it was doubtless a terrible weapon in hands like his. He was not now crouching. He had arisen to

his feet, and he made two or three stealthy, panther-like steps forward, so that he could follow with his glowering, beady eyes the homeward movement of the girl and her cow.

“I wish I knew who fired that gun,” she said, as if speaking to the cow, “but I must n’t wait. What did you get out of the lot for, Nan? We are ever so far in the woods.”

There had been just enough rustling in the bushes and brush behind the tall Indian to suggest that he was not alone, and now another form followed his. It was shorter and more bending or crouching than his own, for it may have been accustomed to bearing burdens. All squaws were pack animals, and so all of them had a habit of leaning forward a little. This one had also a look as if age had helped to bend her without bringing any feebleness, for every line of her face and every movement of her body told of wrinkled but leathery toughness. She was also, if possible, several shades uglier than Kho-go-na-ga.

She was at least a shade darker, making a stronger contrast for the tangled mass of gray-black hair that was tied back from her low, sloping forehead. Her

face was broad and flat, and there was more cruelty in the expression of her mouth and eyes, all the time, than there was in his own, except when his hand was on his knife or tomahawk. She did not presume to push forward beside him, for a squaw's place was to follow and to obey, and to be beaten if she trespassed upon the superiority of her lord and master.

There was only the slightest tint of romance about the domestic affairs of the red savages of the American forests, but these twain, creeping out from their lair in the peaceful-looking autumnal woods, were a perfect representative of the most terrible element in the long, dark romance of the old frontier.

Away beyond the western border of the open, the boy behind the tree was now satisfied that his gun was ready for use.

"The cow 's going along all right, too," he said to himself. "That was Lyra that called her. I'll finish the buck and then I'll see that she gets home. She ought not to be out so far. We've got to be on the look-out."

He spoke in a low but clear voice, that one would

hardly have expected to hear from a boy who could not yet have reached his fifteenth birthday. He looked lithe and sinewy, rather than strong, if it had not been for the apparent ease with which he handled so very heavy a gun. He was deeply sunburned, of course, but there had been a dark complexion to begin with, and so there was now an all but Indian tan upon his face, which, aided by his aquiline nose, suggested the thought of a young warrior. It did not really spoil his looks, however, for his features were regular and his eyes were pleasant enough, while his coon-skin cap rested upon closely cropped, dark chestnut curls. He wore coarse, homespun trousers and a battered buckskin hunting-shirt, but followed the boy-fashion of his day and time in being barefooted. Shoes were for snow-time, and even then good moccasins would do, if a pair could be traded for with friendly Indians. There was a butcher-knife in his belt, and he knew just what to do with his buck before leaving him.

“Squire Warner ’ll bring a pony,” he said, as he turned to go away. “I’ll get in as quick as I can. He must fetch him home to-night.”

Just then he reached the edge of the open, but there he paused, and Kho-go-na-ga himself had not peered out more cautiously.

“No, I won’t,” he muttered. “Lyra and the cow have gone on all right. I’ll go around.”

He turned to the right as he spoke, and pushed along rapidly, but seemed to take extraordinary pains not to step upon a stick or make any noise as his bare feet lightly pressed the dry leaves and mosses they trod on. It may have been the habitual caution of a hunter, but he was not now hunting, and there seemed to be no good reason why his eyes should also glance so swiftly, piercingly around him.

“Dear me!” Lyra was exclaiming. “If that was Dan, I wish he’d come along. I want to know if he hit that deer. If he did, he won’t be scolded so much. I’m glad father won’t let Mr. Prindle whip him. He wants to, awfully!”

That looked bad for Dan, but so did another and altogether different matter, not belonging to any Mr. Prindle. That is, it would have looked very bad indeed if Kho-go-na-ga had not been a very cunning Indian, fully aware of the straightforward

stupidity of white men. He had seen the buck dash out at the western border of the open. He had heard the gun, and he knew that the pale-face hunters were good shots. He also seemed to take it for granted that the marksman, if successful, would be found by his game, unless he left it and followed the girl and cow across the bit of natural pasture.

The squaw could watch where she was, and a quick succession of peremptory signs, with hand and eye, gave her his orders. He also muttered a few words in their own tongue, but if he spoke her name, or if she repeated it, several syllables could have been conveniently left off for ordinary use, leaving it cut down to Ung-gah-wish.

She crouched again, watching, while he departed upon his errand, whatever it might be, carrying his bow in his left hand, with an arrow ready for the string. He kept along the border of the forest, as if not wishing to expose himself, and yet it did not seem possible that he was on any kind of war-path. The presence of Ung-gah-wish, if that was the name of his very unpleasant-looking companion, indicated

peace, according to all the known customs of the red men, and he was not in war-paint. There must have been, however, a strong general conviction that neither of them had any business there at that time, and a very strong desire to keep their presence a secret. Stealthily as he stepped, nevertheless, and keenly as he watched, from tree to tree, he allowed himself to stare too long in one direction, just when the loud, inquisitive chipper of a large gray squirrel in the tree over his head signalled to Dan van Lennep.

“Ugh!” exclaimed Dan, for all the world like an Indian. “There’s one! Now I know I was right about that trail.” Down he dropped behind a log, and when Kho-go-na-ga’s head turned again there was no young white hunter to be seen.

That, too, was just at the point where the Indian was to turn and go deeper into the woods, westerly, if he were to find the deer or the supposed white sportsman. He did so, not dreaming what eyes followed him, or how quickly Dan arose, or how swiftly he hastened around the southerly side of the clearing, for the Indian had come from the

opposite direction. Thereby Dan escaped being seen by the watching squaw, besides leaving a very serious puzzle for her husband.

Kho-go-na-ga found the deer, for he reached a place from which he could see it, lying at the roots of a tree, as if waiting to be taken up and carried away.

“Pale-face gone! Ugh!” muttered the red man, in tolerable English. “Where go?”

At that moment Dan himself was remarking, as he hurried forward:

“He may be all alone. Hope he is. Of course he ’ll find the buck. Wonder what he ’ll do with it. Wish Lyra was safe home with that cow!”

He seemed even angry with the cow for some reason, but he should not have been, for she was plodding steadily along homeward. She and Lyra together made the most peaceful picture of all the many peaceful, beautiful pictures of the quiet, many-tinted, nut-ripening autumn woods, among whose deceptive shadows lurked the arrow, the tomahawk, and the scalping-knife.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW ON THE FRONTIER.



T the upper end of the little lake the primeval woods came down to the margin, and many of the grand old trees reached out long arms so far that their ripened nuts and loosened leaves were drowned at once. Others were leaning forward and were looking down into their own lengthening shadows upon the glassy surface at the moment when a great, brilliantly uniformed trout flashed out and plunged in again, rippling and spoiling their mirror. So they all looked down the lake toward Plum Hollow, as if asking of the people in the village:

“Did any of you see that? It was the largest trout that ever showed himself to us, and we have watched Silver Lake for centuries.”

Time had been when they had seen upon it birch-bark canoes and painted warriors, and when all its

borders were forest, and when, at the southern end, the water that was poured into it by the little river from the northerly hills rushed out and went foaming down the rock-broken rapids unhindered on its way to its own branch of the Susquehanna.

Now the intruding white settlers had built a dam there, exceeding all the genius of all the beavers of the ancient time. They had also set up a saw-mill to turn the forest monarchs into lumber; and a grist-mill to make flour and meal of the crops of grain from the yearly increasing reaches of good land, from which on all the southerly and easterly sides of the lake the wilderness had forever passed away.

The village itself was only a cluster of houses near the mills, but along the roads, up and down the river and the lake, there were many other houses. These, too, were at such short intervals from each other as suggested the idea of only small farms, until one noticed that while the long slope of the easterly hills was also cleared and seemed to be under cultivation, no houses were to be seen there.

Of course here was a neighborly and sociable pop-

ulation, desiring to have their homes near each other, instead of scattered around the country, too far apart for the housewives to run in and gossip. It must have been pleasanter, too, for all the young people, and the children had shorter walks to take to the schoolhouse in the village. There was but one church as yet, apparently, but all the good people were nearer to that and to the mills. There was a tavern not far from the mills, but it was a small affair, and a little beyond it there was an altogether different structure, that called for special study before it could be rightly and fully understood.

From the border of the lake and up to the road, and then for a little distance along the road, cornering at the tavern, ran a curious kind of fence. It was all of heavy posts set close together, ten feet high above ground, and pointed. In all the line of this fence there was only one gate, very wide, through which ran the wagon track toward the mills. The fence went on until it turned and again went down to the water's edge at the dam. Just at the gate on the road about thirty feet of it was

taken up by a clumsy, gloomy-looking building of two low stories, built of very heavy logs, through which there was neither door nor window. The upper story, too, jutted out nearly three feet beyond the lower, for this was a block-house, and the long post-fence was a stockade, and the whole was Plum Hollow Fort.

No other structure in all the valley, not even the meeting-house at the upper end of the village, nor the schoolhouse half-way between, had been built so expressly for the purpose of gathering all the neighbors together in case of need. Inside of the stockade were several buildings of logs or lumber, and the mills themselves were strongly made. The lake was evidently considered a kind of protection on that side, but a lighter stockade ran part of the way along the bank. There were loop-holes here and there in the stockade, as well as in the walls of the block-house. Regarded as a defence from foes without cannon, Plum Hollow Fort looked as if a courageous garrison of good marksmen could hold it against a pretty strong attacking force. It had an air of age, however, and almost of neglect, so

that it hardly interfered with the pervading air of perfect peace which had settled, with the hazy fascination of the ripening season, over all the prosperity and plenty of the evidently thriving settlement.

The river road was also the main street, and after it left the village and went on toward the northerly highlands it wound hither and thither until it disappeared in the narrow gap through which Ske-nauga Creek came in to feed the lake and run the mills. It was a narrow road, as well as crooked, and now it was but a bed of dust between its borders of fading mayweed. On one side, however, a well-trodden footpath neatly skipped the elbows of the rail-fence, and along this path, nearly half a mile above the village, walked a man who seemed to have something on his mind.

He was a short man, and thin, but he carried an air of dignity in perfect keeping with his prim cocked hat, his knee-breeches, and his ivory-headed cane. It was true that an over-critical eye might have noticed age as well as dignity in the aspect of the cocked hat, and that the closely fitting stockings

that clothed him below the knee had been darned here and there. Nevertheless, his shoe-buckles were of silver, and so were the broad rims of his spectacles, although there was no silver in his hair, and he seemed in the very vigor and prime of respectable and self-respecting life. That appeared also in his way of putting down his cane, and in the agility with which he got out from a big bunch of bull-thistles into which he walked at a turn of the road. It was said by the learned that this peculiar plant had been but latterly imported in hay seeds from Scotland, but it was spreading fast and thriving well, and was the especial aversion of the red men. Even more than the red clover itself it was "the white man's foot."

A fit of deep thought had been to blame for all the harm done to the group of thistles, as well as for the interruption of a large, quick-tempered bumble-bee at work among them. He may have been already exasperated by a failure to find any honey among frosted plant-heads; but the sudden sweep of an ivory-headed cane knocked one of them from under him, and his next perch was made just

above the junction of the darned stockings and the knee-breeches.

“O tempora! O Moses!” loudly exclaimed the cane-swinger, as he danced along the path. If he had begun in Latin he ended in English, and in an effort to rub his leg while he was walking; but his next remark did not seem to fit exactly. “That bee!” he exclaimed. “Or it must have been a wasp; or a hornet. I’ll flog him! I will flog him, no matter what they say! He must do his duty reg’larly, or I’ll flog him.”

The bumble-bee had done his duty and could not have deserved a flogging; but now the hastened advance of the walker had carried him well around the turn, and he had also recovered his dignity, if not his temper.

At his right lay a broad, rich field of Indian corn. The height of the stalks and the fulness of the ears told of the rich soil they sprang from. Nearly half the field had already been swept by the cutlass-like corn-knife, such as one vigorous worker was even now plying. Against the shock next to the one he was making, however, leaned another tool, telling

another story. A large powder-horn and a shot-pouch rested upon the crown of one of the innumerable pumpkins that gave the field such a yellow-dotted face, and against the next pumpkin rested the heel of just such a long-barrelled, bell-muzzled, flint-locked piece as that with which Dan van Lennep had brought down the buck. Loaded and ready for use, it belonged to the harvest field of the old frontier as much as did sickle or corn-knife. Therefore the dignified man in the road paid it no manner of attention. He did but rub his leg again in memory of the bee, and then straighten himself into prim severity as he strode on toward the nearest building.

This was a log-built affair, with a very wide mouth of a door that opened at the roadside. At the further end arose an unusually large, high chimney, but no smoke was coming out of it.

"I'll go right into the shop," said the man with the cane, and he at once did so.

The inside of that place explained some things, for anybody could understand, at a glance, the forge, the work-benches, sledges, horseshoes, the scattered

parts of wagons and the wheels and tires. It was a blacksmith shop, no doubt, but it was something more, for one of the vices held a rifle-barrel with a long "rimmer" sticking out of it, and there were rusty old guns of various patterns leaning in the corners. There was no workman at bench or bellows, and the next remark made was:

"Where can he be? I'll go to the house. If Dan is there, I'll do my duty."

Every line of his face grew stern with that great determination, and his paces grew longer as he strode through the smithy and out at a side door that let him into a small door-yard.

Was this another fort?

It looked like it, in part, for the house had an upper story that jutted over the lower, and its windows were provided with massive-looking blinds on the inside, so that they could be barred. All but those in front were open just now, however, and the house, with the barns and the corn-cribs behind it, and the apple-trees, and a long row of newly washed milk-pans, had a very homelike and peaceful look. It was a prosperous-seeming house, with a well-kept

yard, but in the side doorway stood a tall, noble-looking woman, with hair as white as the driven snow.

“Husband,” she said to a brawny, middle-aged man, wearing a leather apron, who stood just beyond the broad, stone doorstep; but at that moment she was interrupted by:

“Squire Warner, Daniel van Lennep was again a truant to-day. I fear he is in the woods again. Spare the rod and spoil the child.”

“Dan is not a child, Mr. Prindle; but I was saying——”

“Mrs. Warner, I have done my duty this day by four youths who were older than he is. Squire——”

“We’ll talk about it some other time,” at that moment came in a very sonorous bass from the bearded lips of Squire Warner.

“Not here since noon, Hannah? Lyra gone to the woods after that cow? Why, how could the critter ha’ gotten out?”

“The road-bars were down.”

“If that is n’t Jake again! He never puts up anything!” grumbled the Squire.

“Wou-ou-ou-oo-woof!” poured mournfully, fiercely also, from among the apple-trees in the back yard.

“She did n’t even have York with her?” exclaimed the blacksmith anxiously. “She’s all alone?”

“Woo-ow-oo-waugh!” responded the voice among the apple-trees.

“He was tied up,” said Mrs. Warner. “I s’pose she did n’t set out to go far.”

“He can find her, anyhow,” said the Squire. “Prindle, will you just please holler for Jake Dunbar to quit work and come along? Tell him to bring his gun.”

“Certainly, cert’nlee!” replied Mr. Prindle with energy. “Lyra in the woods! I’ll get my gun. I’ll call Jake.”

He set out at once, and as he disappeared through the shop a whimpering tumult of canine anxiety greeted the approach of Squire Warner to the place where York waited for him.

“How ’d you know anything was out o’ j’int?” asked the blacksmith, or gunsmith, or “Squire,” as he stooped to unfasten the chain from the collar.

“Woo-oo-oof!” whimpered York, restraining his feelings until his neck was free.

The moment that was done, however, he dashed forward with a deep-throated, angry bark, and began to rush hurriedly around, with his nose down, as if smelling for something. He was no ordinary dog, for his size was that of a well-grown mastiff, while his marks were those of a bloodhound. He represented two of the great dog families, and he was a credit to both of them.

In a moment more he went over the low fence which separated the house-yard from the pasture lot beyond, and then there came a long howl, as if of discovery, for he had found something, and he stood still, looking back and waiting.

The white-haired woman in the doorway had stepped out a few paces, and stood looking westward. Beyond the road there was cleared ground where a crop of summer grain had been, but beyond that was the fringe of trees on this bank of Ske-nauga Creek, and across the narrow ribbon of rushing water was the wilderness which reached toward the setting sun. Up the road, at no great distance,

a path turned from it to the left and shortly reached a rude bridge, wide enough for one wagon. That bridge was across the Skenauga, but it was also over the frontier.

Earnestly, wistfully she looked, while the lines upon her intensely sad but intellectual face deepened eloquently.

“Silas is with Washington,” she said. “Oh, how I wish I could hear from him! It is so long! Lyra, what did you go for? I hope Dan is out there, somewhere. He knows more about Indians than anybody else does. Poor fellow! No, old Prindle sha’n’t lay a finger on him.”

She was still gazing when her husband shouted to her:

“There, Hannah! York has found Lyra’s trail, in the pastur’. We’ll set right out.”

Prindle had done his duty, no doubt, for he now again appeared through the door of the shop. He had left his cane behind, for he had enough to carry without it. There were several queer pieces in the gunsmith’s armory, but there could not have been anything more remarkable than Mr. Prindle’s gun.

It was as if a flint-lock musket had been made for a very large man, allowing wood enough in the breech for his long arms, and quite enough of iron everywhere, and then the barrel had been sawed off to a length of about two feet. A large thumb could have been freely turned in the bore of that roarer. Prindle eyed it with pride while he measured out powder to load it. He was not mean about powder nor wad nor ramming, and he was free with slugs and buck-shot. When the priming was done that weapon was indeed dangerous.

“Jake,” shouted Squire Warner, “Lyra’s followed her cow to the woods. What did you leave down the bars for?”

“Have n’t been in the pastur’, nohow,” responded Jake slowly, thoughtfully. “Never do let down any bars. I git over.”

“That’s so,” said the Squire. “You’d never take the trouble. Now, who did let ’em down? Something’s out ’o j’int! Come right along. York’s waiting.”

“Do be careful,” said Mrs. Warner.

“I’ll keep a good look-out, Hannah,” he said, as if

he knew her meaning. "We have n't heard a thing consarning the redskins not this ever so long."

"You never do," she muttered, as she gazed after them. "Never, until——"

And then she was silent, and there came into her face a strange look that somehow accorded well with the exceeding whiteness of her hair.

"How can I wait?" she said.

CHAPTER III.

“HEAP GOOD FRIEND.”



AN hastened around one side of the clearing, while the squaw's keen eyes waited in vain on the other. There was no change, nor cause for any, in the heavy, rusted-copper dullness of her face, but a notable change seemed to have come over his own boyish features from the first glimpse he had caught of Kho-go-na-ga. They suddenly became very much less boyish, but that was not all. Something like an expression of deadly fear was in them, but it was not the fear that belongs to cowardice or that runs away, for there are several kinds of fear, and some of them will fight like a cornered wolf. The hunter look was gone, so was the cheerful brightness, much of the intelligence, and in their place was a kind of fierce, resentful cunning. He looked, in fact, less like a white boy and more like a young Iroquois.

“We shall lose that buck,” he said, “but I must save Lyra—and the cow. He was not in his war-paint, but you can’t count on that. I think I won’t scare Lyra, but I want to see the Squire.”

He was not thinking of Prindle, nor of being flogged, and he seemed in no expectation of being followed. He need not have been, for Kho-go-na-ga was a much-puzzled Indian, and during several minutes he lay under the best cover he could get, watching the carcass of the buck. Then he slowly worked his way around from tree to tree, and cautiously approached from the opposite direction.

“Ugh!” he suddenly exclaimed, stooping to examine closely a deep mark upon a patch of moss. “Heap small foot! Heap boy shoot deer. Good. Know how do, now.”

Further remarks and exclamations partly set forth his idea that Plum Hollow settlement must be resting in utter security when boys were permitted to hunt and when girls pastured their cows in the forest. It seemed to give him great satisfaction, as if it were a welcome discovery or was the kind of information he was in search of.

“Kho-go-na-ga friend,” he said, with a ferocious grin. “Take squaw. Walk in village. See pale-face friend. Good!”

That may have meant that settlers who were not in any fear of red enemies were not likely to shoot him as he came in; but he had more in his mind, for he at once drew his knife and proceeded to finish the process of butchering Dan’s game.

“Lyra!” called out the young hunter as he almost caught up with her. “I’m glad you found Nan.”

“O Dan!” she exclaimed. “Did you get that buck?”

“Yes, I did,” replied Dan, “but he ’s a heavy one. It’ll take the pony——”

“Of course it will,” she said. “But won’t old Prindle give it to you! He said he would.”

“No, he won’t,” remarked Dan, in a set, positive way. “But I’ll go to school to-morrow—or maybe I will. We must hurry home now.”

“I wish you would go to school regularly, and study,” said Lyra. “But I’m glad you were there to get that buck.”

She spoke like a settler’s daughter, for every girl

on that frontier had been brought up with a clear idea that game formed an important part of the family supplies.

There was no use in attempting to hasten the deliberate march of Nannie, and Lyra had plenty of time to tell of her own surprise that afternoon when she found the bars down and the pasture lot empty.

“You ought to have gone back after York,” said Dan. “He’d have found her for you in no time.”

“So he would,” replied Lyra, “but I did n’t think she’d gone far beyond the bridge. When I got across, though, I went right on and on. But I did find her. I thought of Indians all the way, too.”

Dan was silent, for he had paused and was looking back, as if listening.

“Did you hear anything?” she asked.

“No, I did n’t,” he said, “but you must n’t come across that bridge again.”

“Nannie must n’t either,” said Lyra; but the cow required urging just then, and the deepening shadow in Dan’s face escaped special notice.

“I don’t want to scare her,” he said to himself,

“but I s’pose I’ll have to scare the Squire and the rest of them. Wish I knew what tribe he belonged to.”

The Squire and his two friends were not exactly scared, but they were now just crossing the little bridge over the Skenauga, and Mr. Prindle was valiantly leading the way. He was marching well, with pretty long steps, for a man of his size. He held his gun well forward, in both hands most of the time, but every now and then he let go with his left to reach down and rub something a few inches above the top of the stocking on that side. Twice he said to himself, “It is swelling. It smarts dreadfully. It was a very large bee.”

Firm endurance of affliction, however, appeared to be one of his good qualities, and so was courage, for he even pushed on in advance of the others, while the Squire and Jake lingered to gaze in all directions among the trees.

“Indians?” remarked Mr. Prindle. “There have been no Indians heard of in these parts for many a day. They do not even come in to trade.”

“That’s the worst of it,” said Squire Warner, a

number of paces behind him, and Jake added gloomily:

“If the redskins was n’t hostile, they’d come in. Thar’s suthin’ up, now, jest as sure’s you live.”

He was strictly correct.

“Moo-oo-oo!” sounded from around a curve of the bush-bordered path they were following.

“Woo-oo-oof!” rang out a deep, rejoicing bark, just as a girl’s voice added cheerfully:

“Why, York, who untied you?”

Up came the tremendous gun to the shoulder of Mr. Prindle. It had a very, very long stock, and it was not easy for him to adjust it as he rapidly retreated. Still he bravely kept his face to the foe, and that was the reason why one of his heels caught upon an ant-hill just as he vigorously pulled back the hammer. Down went the schoolmaster, off went the gun, and its uplifted muzzle hurled a shower of slugs and shot among the dense foliage of an overhanging tree. A roaring report went out through the forest, as if searching for something. Whatever else it found, it stirred up a furious baying in the excited mastiff-bloodhound, compelling him

to cease jumping all over Lyra in his glad efforts to kiss her and tell her he had been anxious about her.

“Oh!” exclaimed Mr. Prindle.

“York has found ’em,” shouted the Squire, as he strode swiftly forward, followed by Jake. “She’s all right, cow and all!”

Flop, flop, flop, down, down, down, from a lofty limb in the deepening gloom above them, swept a ghastly, ghostly shape that said, “Hoot-who?” as it came.

Mr. Prindle had already made an heroic effort to sit up, with both hands on the ground and his gun across his lap, but now he also exclaimed:

“Who? What?” in a loud and agitated voice, for right between his outstretched shoes, with their silver buckles, there stood or sat another silvery thing, glaring at him with fiery, angry eyes, full of the most unbounded wrath and astonishment.

“Biggest gray aowl I ever saw,” said Jake as he turned to look; but at that moment the Squire was half scolding Lyra, and had just said:

“Think how your mother felt when she knew you were beyond the bridge.”

“Why, father,” replied Lyra, “I came after Nannie. I was afraid she’d be lost. There is n’t a bit of danger.”

“Squire,” began Dan, as if he had something to say and hardly knew how to say it.

“Dan,” interrupted the Squire, “Prindle’s here too. That was his gun——”

“Fetched daown an aowl aout o’ that tur-ree!” shouted Jake from around the turn; but Mr. Prindle’s game again spoke for himself and said:

“Hoo-oot! Who? Who?”

“Oh dear me!” responded Mr. Prindle. “What on earth shall I do?”

“Woof!” barked York, as he arrived and began to dance around them. “Wough!”

The cow was just coming in to complete the picture, and Lyra broke out into a ringing laugh at it; but Dan had beckoned to the Squire and was whispering:

“Redskins! I saw one. Not in war paint; only a hunter.”

“And Lyra in the woods!” gasped her father.

“I killed a buck, as Lyra told you,” continued

Dan. "We could get him before dark if we went now."

"'T would n't be safe any later," said the Squire. "Maybe 't is n't now. They might set a trap for us."

"I guess not," said Dan, looking less and less like a white boy. "That is n't what they're up to this time——"

"Take him away!" screeched poor Mr. Prindle, for just then he had moved one of his legs, and the great gray bird had understood the movement as hostility.

"Nipped ye, did he?" laughed Jake; but he had already taken out a tremendous bandanna handkerchief, somewhat the worse for wear, and had approached the owl from behind.

Down fluttered the red muffler over the ludicrous head; there was a half-smothered squawk and hoot, and in another moment the owl was not only blindfolded but fettered.

"Jest one slug battered the butt of his right wing," said Jake. "Did n't even break it, but it stunned it for flyin'. Tell ye what, Prindle, we'll take him hum and you kin larn him the rule o' three and spellin'."

“Who? Who? Hoot!” came mournfully from under the bandanna, but it was of no use for an owl to struggle with his head downward and his feet tied together.

Mr. Prindle was now standing up, and his first remark was:

“Who could ha’ supposed him to be contained in that oak? I fired altogether at random. I will now at once reload my gun.”

“Load up, load up,” said the Squire. “Lyra, drive Nannie home. Dan, how far is it to that buck?”

“Just a short walk,” began Dan, but it was even shorter than he could have imagined, for a hoarse though friendly “Ugh!” sounded among the shadows of the path behind him.

“Oh,” said Mr. Prindle, “I’ve put the shot in first. Oh dear me! An Indian! I must get the shot out.”

Jake was busy with his owl, but the Squire stepped forward at once, while Dan merely allowed the barrel of his gun to fall from his shoulder into the hollow of his left arm.

There was no immediate danger in the arrival of

that red man, for he was carrying, with greater apparent ease than might have been expected, the very game they were proposing to go after.

“Ugh!” he said again. “Kho-go-na-ga heap friend. Bring deer. No leave meat for wolf.”

Down he lowered it at the feet of the brawny blacksmith, and the latter at once reached out a friendly hand, saying:

“How. Glad you’re a friend. Dan, I guess it’s your game.”

“Give him all he wants of it,” said Dan. “There’s his squaw, too. I did n’t see her when I saw him.”

Kho-go-na-ga’s eyes glittered somewhat in the glance they gave the young hunter who had seen him without being seen, while a glance of intelligence shot across the dull face of Ung-gah-wish. She uttered several syllables also, and another “Ugh!” escaped the lips of her husband.

“I’ll kerry it the rest of the way,” remarked Jake. “Here, Dan, you take keer o’ Prindle’s aowl. Do n’t ye lose him on no accaount. You kin take him to school with ye daytimes, and he kin sleep with Prindle.”

Squire Warner had other questions to ask of Kho-go-na-ga as they went along, and it was evidently no new experience for him to meet a red man. Ung-gah-wish kept her proper place of humility, well behind all the men, while Lyra had already reached the bridge with Nannie, and that unthinking first-cause of so much anxiety was walking more briskly now that she could see the open bars of her own pasture lot.

She was undoubtedly pleased with the thought of getting home again, but she could have had no idea of being so very welcome a cow. In the open gate of the yard, in front of the house, there stood, leaning anxiously forward and staring toward the bridge, a tall woman with white hair, in whose deep blue eyes there lurked an expression that was fast becoming one of absolute terror.

“How long they are!” she said. “O Lyra! Can they not find her? Oh, my girl, my daughter! Those hideous——”

At that very moment a pair of horns and a blazed, benevolent face came in sight, and then a girl's hand, flourishing a stick.

Mrs. Warner did not speak, she screamed. She had to draw a long, long breath before she could say, lovingly, half chokingly:

“Thank God! There she is! There was n’t any danger, after all. But just as good girls as she is! Men, too! Why does n’t General Washington do something? Is he going to let those red tigers burn and murder forever? O Lyra!”

She was not looking at anything up the road. She heard no sound of hoofs, and yet a horseman came on at a vigorous gallop, until he drew rein in front of her and bowed low, saying:

“Letter for you, Mrs. Warner. Guess it’s from Silas. I’ve got to ride right on and take some more to the folks in the village. They say there’s a stir ’mong the redskins.”

Her hand had gone out for the letter, of course, and she said:

“Oh, thank you, Walter. I’m so glad to get it. Silas? Yes. Redskins——”

But the horseman was a messenger with a duty of haste, and he was off at a gallop without uttering another word of the news he might be carrying.

“Mother,” shouted Lyra, “I did n’t go so very far. Dan shot a buck and Mr. Prindle shot an owl.”

“O Lyra, I’m so glad you’re safe. Letter from Silas, too. Come right into the house. You must n’t go out again without York.”

“Woof! Woof!” was what York repeated, as he reached the gate and jumped up to kiss Mrs. Warner; but his actual remark was, by any fair interpretation:

“Here she is. Cow, too. I found ’em. Got an owl, and a deer, and a redskin. Hurrah!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOG-HOUSE HOME.



AKE DUNBAR'S bones were large and his back was broad. He carried his load of prime venison even more easily than had Kho-go-na-ga. He did not pause at the gate, but went on through the yard and hung up the buck on a hook in the meat-house, adjoining the kitchen part of the house. He did so hastily and walked back again, to find Squire Warner still at the gate, carrying on a queer, difficult conversation with the red man. Dan van Lennep stood near them, looking very sullen and as if he were tired. Mr. Prindle had carried his gun to the shop for some reason, and was out of sight.

“Come,” said Jake to Kho-go-na-ga. “Come with me and I’ll cut off your sheer o’ the buck for ye. Get your supper, too. Bring along the squaw.”

“Good!” said the Indian. “Ugh! Heap eat. Friend of old gun man.”

“Go,” said the Squire. “Glad to see friend. Do n’t want any bad Indians.”

“Kho-go-na-ga Onondaga. Friend. Heap good Indian me!” was the very emphatic reply as he and Ung-gah-wish went through the gate.

Jake lingered a moment, to hurriedly enquire:

“Squire, what’re we goin’ to do with ’em? They’re jest pisen to look at.”

“Feed ’em and let ’em go,” said the Squire. “What is it, Dan?”

“He’s a Tuscarora,” said Dan. “Spy. Ought not to go to see the fort.”

“He sha’n’t, then,” said the Squire; “but what makes you say so?”

“He carried the buck,” said Dan. “No Onondaga warrior would ha’ done that. He’d have made a Tuscarora carry it for him, though, if there’d been one around. He says Onondaga because white men think some of them are friendly. Most of ’em are the worst kind, though. They say the Tuscaroras are all squaws, pack-carriers.”

“You go to the village, then, and tell ’em he’s here. It’s time we did something more’n we are doing.”

Dan turned away with his gun over his shoulder, and the Squire strode on to the shop.

“I should n’t ha’ left the shop door open,” he said. “Not that anybody ’round here would steal, but I kind o’ feel as if everything ought to be shut up and on guard. That there Tuscarora’s a spy. Not a doubt of it. Dan knows.”

Why should Dan know? And why, if there were enemies in the woods, were they all so very quiet and unconcerned about it as they seemed to be?

The whole situation was full of questions, and not all of them could be answered at once; but the entire American frontier, as it has pushed westward, from the beginning, has presented the same wonderful picture. It has shown ever so many thousands of households living contentedly in the face of the most ghastly peril. It has shown men, women, and children going right along with all the ordinary affairs of life, with a strange indifference to the fact that the woods around them might at any moment ring with the war-whoops of the red

men. Always, too, the sons and daughters of such households have made clearings and built homes a little farther on, fighting more or less while doing so, in a perpetual war for life, and so, rather than by any great battles, have the tribes been worn away. Every now and then, however, there have been great and widespread frontier desolations, and these have as regularly been followed by battles. Fully half of these, too, have been won by the red men.

Jake was now in the meat-house cutting off a quarter of the buck for Kho-go-na-ga, and the Squire was in the house.

This had apparently been built a piece at a time. First there had been a kind of log block-house, one room below and one above, with a huge chimney in the rear. Then just such another had been built on with another chimney. Then there had been an addition for a kitchen, and this was of sawed lumber. One of the barns was of logs and others were of boards, and all were in good condition, but the only paint anywhere to be seen was the deep red of the kitchen addition and of all the doors.

The front room was as nearly a parlor as any settler could ask for. It contained a mahogany bureau, or "chest of drawers"; a broad table with leaves letting down on hinges; a cushioned settee; a big rocking-chair and several other chairs; two worsted-worked ottomans; a well-made oaken bookcase, with several dozens of books; and curtains that half concealed the heavy blinds, with gun-holes in them, that were to close the windows. There was no carpet, but the whole room had an unmistakable air of comfort, prosperity, and refinement.

There was a bright fire on the broad stone hearth, and if anybody had peered past it and up the chimney he might have seen the massive iron bar that crossed above the ample mouth, so that no intruder, scalping-knife in belt, could come down into the house from the roof by that passage. It was just like every other big chimney on all the New York and Pennsylvania frontier, for in the olden wars New England homes had been lost for lack of that precaution, while the inmates were asleep and all the doors were barred.

The back room was like the front, except that

there was almost no room in it. There was a high-post bedstead, with a many-colored patchwork counterpane, very rich and brilliant; and a spinning-wheel, ready for action, with its reel standing by it pretty well filled. A great hand-loom against the northern wall was evidently at work upon flax goods just now. On a rough table stood a basket of apples and another of pears. Over the chimney, over each door, and over one of the windows there were wooden hooks, and each set of hooks but one contained a gun, for the Squire had his gun with him. Front and rear, the outer doors were provided with gun-holes, having slides to close them, and there were signs of similar arrangements for defence here and there at the joinings of the wall-logs.

Take it all in all, with the hay-ricks and the corn-cribs by the barns, this was a capital specimen of a frontier farmhouse of the better class, and it had grown to its present state of perfection during nearly three generations.

The front room had an occupant, for Mrs. Warner stood leaning against the mantel with an open letter

in her hand. The loom-room was also garrisoned, for Mr. Prindle was there with Lyra. He had put one foot on a chair and was ruefully studying a sad rent in one of his stockings.

“That awful bird!” he said. “That is where his hooked beak got hold of me. Extraordinary! Who could have imagined that there was an owl in that oak?”

Many are the problems in human life, but there was no connection whatever between the owl and the oak and his next remark:

“I’m glad he got the buck, but I must do my duty by him. I cannot allow him to grow up in ignorance. He lost a great deal of schooling while he was with the Indians. He is the stupidest——”

“Why, no, he is n’t, Mr. Prindle,” exclaimed Lyra. “Dan is n’t stupid at all. That is, sometimes he is n’t. It won’t do him any good to flog him. He knows more than the other boys.”

“Spare the rod and spoil the child,” said the schoolmaster. “I shall attend to Daniel van Lennep to-morrow.”

“If you do try to flog him,” said Lyra, with a

flushed face, "I do n't believe he 'll ever come again. I 'm going to speak to mother about it."

"Not now, Lyra," said her father, as he walked rapidly through the room. "I must see her a moment."

"She said so——" but before Lyra could say more he had closed the door of the front room behind him.

"Abner," said his wife as he did so, but she held out the letter, and as he took it she added: "Think of Wyoming! Why does n't General Washington do something? They burned a thousand houses. O Abner, I did suffer so while Lyra was in the woods!"

His eyes were swiftly running over the closely written lines of the letter.

"Why, Hannah," he said, "do n't you see what Silas says? Washington can't help himself. He could have men enough to drive the British into the sea, if Congress could arm them and feed them. We could raise a company in Plum Hollow. It 's what we 've got to do. O Hannah, this is dreadful! But then they are getting an expedition ready for next year. Sullivan is to command it."

“If we ’re not all murdered before they march,” exclaimed Mrs. Warner.

“It is n’t likely the redskins ’ll strike in this direction,” said the Squire gloomily. “I wish I knew what to do with this Indian. Dan says he ’s a spy.”

“Dan was with them over a year,” she said. “Nobody knows how long. He ’s the strangest boy! It ’s of no use for Prindle to punish him. He must n’t do it. He is n’t like any other boy.”

“Of course he is n’t,” said the Squire; “but all boys are boys.”

“Don’t I know what ’s the matter with Mr. Prindle?” sharply enquired his wife. “Lyra told me. She says Dan knows now more than Prindle can teach. He does n’t study, even when he ’s there, but he recites.”

“How could he have learned to read?” said the Squire. “Writing, too, and ’rithmetic. Glad Silas is well, but his pay is n’t worth any more, now he ’s a first lieutenant, than it was when he was a private.”

“Pay!” said Mrs. Warner scornfully. “What ’s continental currency good for? And he ’s barefoot,

too! How shall I get his new clothes sent to him? And cold weather coming on."

"We 'll find a way," said the Squire; "but do n't you see what the matter is? Only men like Silas will stay in such an army. God bless old Washington! If it was n't for him——"

"I wish Sullivan and his men would come and kill every redskin south of the Mohawk!" burst from the quivering lips of Mrs. Warner. "And every Tory! I think of their awful works every time I look at Dan van Lennep. He dare n't speak a word about what became of his family."

"He can't, somehow," said the Squire. "I guess it's better that he does n't know."

"Perhaps he does know," she said; "and I do n't wonder he hates Indians. Anyhow, Prindle sha'n't flog him."

They had more to say, and the letter had to be read again, with many a fatherly and motherly word of love and pride for the absent son, who had won promotion and honor among the iron men who were holding out to the end for the freedom of their country.

Meantime Dan himself had reached the village. Even in the dusk he could see that there was more than usual stir, but he did not hear anything of the arrival of the mounted messenger until he reached the open gateway of the stockade.

“Walt Hawley!” he suddenly exclaimed. “Is that you? The Squire said you ’d come.”

“Rode all day,” replied a stalwart youth who had come to the gate as if looking out for somebody. “Left a letter from Sile with Mrs. Warner as I came by. Guess he ’s all right. But the redskins are stirring, Dan. I fetched news that ’s waking our folks up a little.”

“Got one at our house,” said Dan. “A Tuscarora and a squaw. Making believe friend—good Indian.”

He had spoken out, and had been heard by other ears than Walter’s, so that he was replied to by half a dozen eager enquiries at once. Already, inside the gate, there was quite a gathering of men and boys, and, as Walter had said, more were rapidly arriving. Hardly one of them came unarmed, and yet each in turn said and was told:

“There is n’t any danger. No redskins are coming to Plum Hollow.”

Just about as regularly was an answer made that amounted to :

“Yes, but we ’d best be ready for ’em if they do come. It ’s time we mended up the old fort a little. The gate does n’t swing right, and there ought to be more gun-holes.”

“Wish we had some cannon.”

“We have n’t as much powder and lead as we ought to have.”

“There ought to be loads o’ provisions and things in the fort storehouses.”

Comment after comment was made, for it was a kind of improvised town-meeting; but after all there seemed to be a general spirit of unbelieving recklessness, as if nothing could come to Plum Hollow like the visits made by the red enemy to the Wyoming or Mohawk valleys.

There were older men who said little, and who seemed to be studying the fort, and it was one of these who said to Dan :

“Go right back to Squire Warner and tell him

we 'll leave him to deal with that redskin. His head 's as good as any other in sech a matter. It would n't do to hurt any Indian just now."

"No use," said Dan. "If we did, they 'd come here first thing, and we 're not half ready for 'em."

"Yes, we are," said the old settler who was speaking. "Tell the Squire we 're going to begin to mount guard reg'lar at the fort. I 'll see him to-morrer. There is n't any kind of hurry."

That might be, but somebody was pulling at Dan's elbow, and as he turned away he was asked:

"What did you say about Lyra Warner going into the woods after her cow?"

Dan told, and all the while he was telling Walter Hawley listened as if he had never heard anything more thrilling than the finding of the cow and the bringing in of the buck by the Tuscarora.

"If there 'd been more of 'em, or if you had n't been there," exclaimed Walter, "she 'd ha' never been heard of again. Glad you did n't shoot the redskin, though. 'Fraid I 'd ha' shot him."

"It would n't ha' done," said Dan; "but I had a good bead on him for a moment. For all I know

there might ha' been a dozen, all around. I had n't seen the squaw. Besides, he did n't have any gun."

"Half of 'em have n't," said Walter.

"Yes, they have," replied Dan. "More 'n half of 'em; but they get out o' powder, and a good bow and arrow is better than a poor gun any day."

"Specially without powder," said Walter; but he was called away at that moment, and Dan set out for the house, while the gathering of Plum Hollow settlers continued their discussion of the batch of news and rumors which had arrived, including the latest tidings from Washington's army, from the south, from the British forces, and from the Continental Congress.

There had been a bonfire lighted in the open space within the stockade, and it somehow seemed to raise the spirits of everybody who looked at it. Perhaps that was so, in part, because its bright glare showed them the stockade itself, and the block-house, and how very many strong fellows were there, good marksmen all, with weapons in their hands.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY THAT COULD NOT BE TOLD.



URING all this time there had been a fine volume of blue smoke pouring out of the kitchen chimney of the Warner homestead. There had also been a peculiarly musical stream of sound, not loud but very suggestive, pouring out at the door and windows of that room. It was but one room, but it had a fireplace and chimney of its own. The fireplace was well built, of stones and brickwork, and the crane that swung in front of it was made with two arms that could slide deftly up and down for the better accommodation of larger and smaller kettles. Near it, although not now in use, stood an ample sheet-iron Dutch oven, the open front of which disclosed the long spit on which roasts might turn. There was an oaken dresser, garnished with crockery and queen's-ware, and even with a number of pieces of blue-and-white china.

No silverware was in view, but there were a number of shapes of shining pewter, and the entire aspect of that kitchen was in perfect accord with the exceeding neatness of the one active shape which passed rapidly hither and thither among its treasures, singing as she went.

Singing? Well, yes, not all the time articulately, but always with a rich voice and full, although low and now and then monotonous. Bits of old hymns seemed to be her favorites, but these were oddly alternated with brief selections from a pretty miscellaneous assortment of ballads.

She was evidently preparing an evening meal, in a liberal way, but with only the customary frontier resources, and it was to be spread upon the white pine table that ran nearly across the room.

A plate of butter already stood there, with an ample supply of wheaten bread, and a jug of molasses. There were pickles, apple-sauce, cold pork and beans, a pitcher of cider, another of milk, but there was no sign of tea or coffee.

"Polly! Polly Sackett!" came through the open door in the voice of Jake, "s'pose you take these

'ere steaks and brile 'em now, for the redskin and the squaw. Let 'em hev a couple o' mugs o' cider and some bread."

"Tell 'em to come right in," said Polly. "If your enemy 's hungry, feed him," and in a suppressed voice she added to herself, "and do n't I wish I could heap coals o' fire on his head, a foot deep."

She took the venison steaks from Jake, however, and in a moment more they were on the gridiron and over a bed of hot coals, while Kho-go-na-ga, followed by Ung-gah-wish, slipped quietly in and seated themselves, he on a chair and she on the floor.

He said, "How," almost pleasantly to Polly, but she was only a white squaw, not to be conversed with, and his own squaw did not dream of speaking to any one in his presence.

Polly, too, said, "How," but no more, and a sudden change in her face called attention to the fact that with all its well-fed roundness it was spider-web wrinkled, although the wrinkles were very fine. They showed more plainly when she turned so pale at sight of the tall Tuscarora and glanced from his dark face to the knife and tomahawk in his belt.

These, rather than anything else, were the representatives of Indian character to the settlers on the old frontier.

It was two or three minutes before Polly's color fully came again, and she was just beginning to sing a hymn when she was interrupted by a tremendous "Hoot-to-who? Who?" and Jake Dunbar followed it with:

"There, my chicken, haow do ye like that? Jest sech chaps as you are took off 'baout all the chickens of aour fust settin' this year. Now we 've got ye. Hoot away."

"Jacob," shouted Polly, "what on yearth 's that? You do n't mean to say you 've gone and caged an owl?"

"He said it himself," said Jake, gazing contentedly at his prize. "Glad we hed sech a good coop ready for him. He can't bust the laths nor the wicker. It 's old Prindle's aowl. Goin' to help him keep school. Knows more 'n he does. He can't cipher beyond the rule o' three, nohaow."

There was the great gray bird, indeed, handsomely caged, and staring around him with angry,

wide-open eyes, and with his head drawn back as if he were ready to strike.

“Does n’t he look kind o’ pretty!” said Polly. “Did ye waound him much?”

“No,” replied Jake. “He is n’t hurt to speak of, and oh, but is n’t he good and mad! You kin larn him to sing.”

“Shut up,” said Polly, almost laughing, “or I’ll cook him for ye some day.”

“Do n’t know but what he ’d go down kind o’ good,” said Jake. “Better ’n that old rooster you had to bile for two weeks and then could n’t carve him.”

Polly went back to her gridiron, warned by too dense a cloud of fragrant smoke, but the red man and the squaw sat as still and as unconcerned as if they were used to gray owls in their own wigwam at home.

The hoot went through the whole house, in spite of doors, or it may have gone around and in at windows.

“What is that?” exclaimed Mrs. Warner, in the front room. “It is n’t a war-whoop?”

“Why, Hannah,” laughed her husband, “that ’s Prindle’s owl. I ’ll tell ye. You must n’t be so skeery.”

“I can’t help it,” she said. “Lyra!”

“Here I am, mother. Did you hear that owl hoot?”

She came in with a face that was beaming with fun, but her mother’s arm went quickly around her and she was hugged tightly, all the while that Squire Warner told, so merrily, the queer incident of the schoolmaster’s bombardment of the oak.

Even Mrs. Warner had to smile at last, for, after all, her terror about Lyra in the woods was only an every-day matter, such as might be expected by a woman living where she did.

As for Lyra, she had not been scared at all, at any point of her adventure, and the Squire himself was quite able to turn his thoughts toward his absent son and the Old Continental army.

One other member of the family, however, remained in a disturbed state of mind, for York, after his return, had patrolled the entire premises with exceeding thoroughness. He seemed to take an especial interest in footmarks, or rather in places

where feet had been, whether or not marks remained to tell of them. He lingered a minute or so at the bars of the pasture lot, but seemed satisfied with the results of his exploration, for he uttered a low "Woof" and returned to the house at a brisk trot, smelling as he went. Again he said something to himself at the gate, but a step or so inside of it stood somebody who seemed to be waiting for him, and who asked:

"What about the bars, York? Who are you looking for?"

"Woof!" said York as he trotted on around the house, and Dan followed him, remarking:

"I'll see what he 's up to before I go in to see the Squire. He 's tracking."

The door of the kitchen was open, and the family were all at the table, but the Indian and the squaw had finished their supper and were sitting near the door, conversing, rather by signs than by words, but now and then answering when spoken to by the pale-faced men and women.

Kho-go-na-ga was plainly endeavoring to appear exceedingly friendly, and even Ung-gah-wish put

on repeatedly what might have been her idea of a smiling face. Every time she did so, however, Mrs. Warner looked at her daughter and shuddered, and the wrinkles seemed to deepen in the healthy face of Polly Sackett. There was an unexplainable element of venom in the smile of the Tuscarora squaw, if that were indeed her tribe. She was making that kind of attempt, nevertheless, when York and Dan reached the door, and her attention was suddenly called toward them by a low growl that had in it no hypocrisy whatever. Her husband did not turn his head when he heard it, but her own face changed its expression as her eyes met those of Dan.

There was a flash, as of dull remembrance or recognition, in the scowl which took the place of her smile, but the boy was as expressionless as Kho-go-na-ga himself. The next remark came from the lath-and-wicker cage on the side table. There were three tallow-dip candles burning in the room, and that was quite enough to close the eyes of an owl, but Mr. Prindle's prize heard the growl of York and responded with:

“Who? Hoot! Who?”

“Woof!” said York, and the Squire added:

“Take him away and feed him, Dan, but you need n’t lock him up. I’ll come out and have a talk with ye.”

Away went Dan, but he was beyond the meat-house before he said, in a low, husky voice:

“Now I know who left the bars down so the cow could wander off. This chap is n’t the only redskin in these woods. He has n’t met the other yet. I’ll watch. But where did I ever see that squaw?”

York lay down, to work the better upon some bones before him, but Dan leaned against the meat-house as if he had suddenly grown tired.

“It kind o’ comes back to me sometimes,” he said, “if I shut my eyes and let it come. I do n’t want to. She was there, in the Oneida camp, the night they tortured the prisoners. The squaws did the worst of it, worse than any of the warriors. No, I guess I won’t think of it. I’d rather forget it. But I’ll mould bullets this evening, if Squire Warner’ll give me the lead. Wish I was going to have a rifle. This bell-muzzle ’s too heavy for a trail.”

He hardly looked or spoke like a mere boy. It

was almost dark in the shadow where he stood, and that may have helped make him seem taller, but there must really have been an older side to him, such as nobody ever gets except by experience.

“I believe she knows me,” he said to himself again, “but I won’t let her think I remember her. It was just after some friendly Indians like them came to our house——”

There he stopped, and he was as motionless as a tree for a moment, but there were tears running down his cheeks, and his boyish hands lifted the heavy gun as if he wanted to shoot something.

“Dan,” called the voice of Polly from the house, “why do n’t you come in and get your supper?”

“I ’m coming,” he replied, as he wiped his eyes, but she did not hear him add:

“But think of their coming here! Would n’t it be awful! Mrs. Warner and Lyra and Polly, and all the folks in the village, babies and all. They ’d do just as they did in Wyoming. Wish we could shoot every redskin!”

The pair in the house were behaving in a very friendly way, although Kho-go-na-ga had freely

admitted to the Squire that there were many bad Indians in the world, and that even his own tribe contained a number of warriors not nearly so good and gentle as himself. He did not mention the goodness of his wife, but she sat on the floor very meekly, and looked as peaceful as did the owl in the cage, with his eyes closed to keep out the candle-light.

Mrs. Warner and Lyra were now in the next room, but they were not talking. Mrs. Warner was plying her spinning-wheel with what looked like nervous energy, as if it did her good to step back and forth and keep the spindle whirring. Lyra, on the other hand, was pretending to read. That is, she was staring hard at the pages of a large book that she had brought from the front room, but Mr. Prindle was entirely correct in assuring her :

“You had better be at some work in your own language, Lyra. Even I myself can do nothing with Dutch. It is more difficult, by far, than either the Latin or the Greek. It is more like the Hebrew.”

If he meant her to understand that he was familiar with those ancient tongues, there was no means at hand for proving or disproving him ; but he must

have been wrong about Dutch, for she at once replied:

“Humph! I saw Dan reading it.”

“Did you?” exclaimed her mother. “Now I know more about him. Why, he ’s been with us since last July, and I never have seen him open a book.”

“That is my difficulty with him,” sharply responded the schoolmaster. “I fear that he will lose all his time, unless——”

“It won’t do to flog him,” broke in Mrs. Warner. “I know how you feel. I ’d feel so about any other boy, but you know how he came to the village.”

He evidently did, and as they discussed the punishment question there dropped out into the conversation pretty nearly all the parts of the story of Dan’s arrival.

“A mere vagabond, Mrs. Warner,” was one of Mr. Prindle’s comments. “Nobody knows where he came from, and he ’s too stupid to remember his parents, or where they lived.”

“He ’s no such thing. Father does n’t think he ’s stupid,” said Lyra earnestly. “He ’d been a prisoner among the Indians, and he got away.”

“And there ’s danger that they might come after him,” suggested Prindle, “and I suppose it would be our duty to give him up rather than provoke them to attack the settlement.”

“Give him up!” exclaimed Mrs. Warner, with widening eyes. “Why, I never heard of such a thing. Every man in the valley would go for his gun. They always burn escaped prisoners.”

“Of course they do,” replied Mr. Prindle, somewhat woodenly. “They have fixed customs of their own, with which we have nothing to do. Our disregard of their traditional rights has occasioned a great deal of ill feeling on their part. We must be more conciliatory.”

He spoke with an air of authority, and he knew what to do with a long word whenever he could think of one that would fit; but just then the kitchen door opened and Dan himself walked into the loom-room. Either he had eaten little or he had eaten rapidly, or Polly’s assertion that “he bolted it” may have been correct. He seemed intending to pass through, but Lyra exclaimed:

“Dan, mother did n’t know you could read Dutch. Show her, won’t you?”

“Why,” said Dan, “it’s just like English or French. There is n’t anything really hard to learn, except Onondaga. Even the redskins call that hard.”

“What makes it hard?” asked Lyra.

“I guess it’s because so much of it has to be made away back in your throat,” said Dan. “It’s awful rough.”

“Can you speak it?” asked the schoolmaster. “Were you among that tribe? How long were you among that tribe? What other tribes? When and where?”

No answer from Dan prevented him from asking question after question, in the stern, peremptory tone and manner which so well became him, but he glared in vain through his silver-rimmed glasses. Dan’s eyes half closed for a moment, and there was a slight quiver in his lip, but then he turned to Lyra and said:

“That’s a Dutch Bible, and you’ve opened at the book of Joshua.”

“Joshaway!” came from Polly, in the kitchen door. “Dew read some, won’t ye? I’d like to hear how the Scriptor sounds in Dutch.”

“He must answer my interrogatory,” began the schoolmaster commandingly, but Mrs. Warner was whispering:

“Mr. Prindle, you know he won’t. You can’t get him to say a word about it——” when Dan suddenly began to comply with the joint request of Polly and Lyra, and he undoubtedly could and did read in Dutch.

“He was raised somewhere along the Mohawk, most likely,” said Mrs. Warner to herself. “Some of those settlements are half English and half Dutch, and he learned in both. Some have a natural gift, too.”

That might be, but even the little Onondaga boys and girls could pick up that hard dialect, gift or no gift.

“That ’s Joshaway, is it?” said Polly. “Well!”

“Yes,” said Dan; “but I’ve got to go in and tell the Squire something.”

In he went, and closed the door behind him, just as Jake came from the kitchen with his customary dry grin on his face, remarking:

“Prindle, that there aowl o’ yourn was jest askin’ for ye.”

“I think I will go and interrogate that Indian and his wife,” replied the schoolmaster evasively; but Jake responded:

“You ’ll git more aout o’ yer aowl than you ’ll git aout o’ them. I never knowed an aowl to lie in all my life. You kin bet on anythin’ he tells ye.”

“What are you laughing at, Jake?” said Mrs. Warner.

Not until the schoolmaster was well out of the room did Jacob reply to her:

“Why, Ma’am Warner, that there Tuskyroarer ’s aout in the barn, to sleep. Old Prindle ’d no more think o’ goin’ aout there alone than he ’d think o’ flyin’. He ’d expeck to lose his top-knot if he did go. There ain’t no Injin fighter in Prindle.”

“Everybody may have to fight before long,” she said sadly.

“Hope not,” said Jake cheerily; “but I ’ll bet on some o’ the women ’fore I will on some o’ the men, if it ’s Injins,” and with that he walked out of the house and strolled toward the village, with a gun over his shoulder.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLINT-HEADED ARROW.



R. PRINDLE had not gone for a conversation with the owl in the kitchen. He hardly lingered in the loom-room, either, after discovering that the two "aborigines," as he spoke of them to himself, had "clandestinely departed." The next thing he made use of was not a long word, but a kind of ladder, in a corner of the room, between the loom and the wall. He was a man of some agility, for he went up readily, with a lighted candle in his hand. As soon, however, as his head, hand, and candle were above the level of the upper floor, he paused for a long, searching look around the room he was in. The space on that floor was pretty fairly divided by a board partition, through which a door opened about in the middle.

He quickly satisfied himself that there was noth-

ing there more dangerous than a narrow bed, a chair, and a small pine table, and so he bravely finished his climb.

“Wish I ’d waited for Jacob,” he remarked, almost in a whisper. “I hardly like to go in there alone. Did I hear anything? Wish I ’d brought my gun.”

He stood still and listened, but there was not a sound to break the dimly lighted silence, and he stepped forward on tiptoe to the door. He opened it and peered in. Then he put in a foot and stooped, so that he could see under the bed, and then he was able to draw a long breath, and said aloud:

“Entirely safe; but I must have a gun stationed permanently in this apartment. And I trust that Congress and General Washington will adopt conciliatory measures with the Iroquois. I do not think General Sullivan is the right ambassador to send to them in their present irritated state of mind.”

He said it well and with an air of stern determination, holding his spectacles in one hand and his candle in the other. He even made other remarks of advice to the Continental Congress, concerning the utter hopelessness of longer sustaining that ob-

stinate man, George Washington, in his conflict with the British Empire. What he wanted was peace—peace at home, with his neighbors the Iroquois and the Tories; and peace abroad with his friends the British. It was plain, too, that he had heard much concerning General Sullivan and did not believe him to be at all peacefully inclined.

“The wrong man, therefore, to negotiate a compromise with the haughty aborigines.”

He liked that word, but the idea of putting out his candle, when the time came for it, and of being left alone in the dark, was one he did not like. He hesitated, and pondered, and advised Congress, until at last he assured himself:

“No, I ’ll not put it out. I will leave it burning in Jacob’s room. He may need it to go to bed by. There ought always to be a gun upon this floor. It ’s an awful time for a man like me to keep school in.”

No doubt it was, but he was not the only man in that house who was taking special interest in the gun question. Down in the front room Dan had repeated to the Squire all that he had been told in

the village. He had been listened to very much as if he had been telling only every-day news, and the Squire had remarked:

“All right, I’ll know what to do with this redskin and the squaw.”

He seemed, however, to have only a small degree of interest in them, for he was all the while studying something that lay across his lap. It was the steel barrel which had been in the vise in the gun-shop, but there was no “rimmer” in its bore now. It was but little more than half the length of a good bell-muzzled gun, and Dan looked at it curiously, wondering if such a piece as that could be really good for anything. Not that he did not know something about rifles, but that he had never seen one with so short a barrel and so large a bore.

“We waste too much lead,” remarked the gunsmith, “and lead is scurse.”

“That ’ll carry a big ball,” said Dan.

“Carry it farther than any gun you ever saw,” said Squire Warner, fondling it. “You could lug it all day, too. That there duck-gun’s too heavy for a boy o’ your size. I want ye to take them moulds

to-morrow morning and run bullets till school-time. Then I want ye to go to school and study, and old Prindle won't put any gad onto ye."

"That 's just what I wanted to ask," said Dan. "I 'd stand 'most anything for you and Mrs. Warner, but I do n't need any lickin'."

"You won't get any," said his brawny friend, very kindly. "But after school I 'm going over into the woods to try this gun, and I want you to go with me, and say nothing. They 've all been laughing at it. They do n't know anything about guns!"

He seemed to be fairly in love with the one in his hand, but at that very moment Jake Dunbar and a little squad of men were walking along the road from the village, and Jake was saying:

"Old Warner 's kind o' cracked 'bout rifles. 'Tain't no use. Think o' that stubby jimcrack he 's been borin' into so long! I 'd ruther hev a hoss pistol."

"What we want," said another, "is real Taower muskits, sech as the British reg'lars hev. Next to them, give me a good duckin' gun."

"I do n't know," remarked a third; "a real good long-barrelled rifle can't be beat for close shootin'

at short range, but they do n't throw lead enough to suit me."

"The Squire 's a good blacksmith," said Jake, "and he knows suthin' 'bout guns, but he 's wastin' his time."

Evidently Lyra's father had earned a local reputation as a man who made useless experiments, and even Dan eyed the "stubby jimcrack" with a deal of boyish doubt in his face.

In the other room Mrs. Warner had ceased her spinning, and she and Lyra and Polly were busy with their needles.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Polly, staring at some work in Mrs. Warner's lap. "That 'll be a real warm, good coat, if he ever gets it, but it is n't a uniform."

"I do n't care how he looks, if he does n't freeze this winter," replied Mrs. Warner. "I wish he had some shoes. Lyra, you'll have to wear moccasins."

"I do n't care," said Lyra. "I'm used to going barefoot. So is Polly."

"Guess I can wear 'em, if a squaw can," said Polly cheerfully. "But we sha'n't have any wool to

weave with if we do n't get some more pretty soon. We can't, either, if the Indians are coming."

The white look flashed again across Mrs. Warner's face, and she arose and put away her work.

"Come, now," she said, "it won't do to burn candles at this rate. We must dip another lot before long, and we must make all the soap we can, too."

Almost everything they had to say contained some point or other that told of the ways and means of life on the frontier. Not that there was any complaining or discontent, however, for they were almost rich in their own eyes. They had more than had many of their neighbors, and the future was bright with hope—if it had not been for Silas in the army and for the grim red spectre that was mentioned, every now and then, as creeping nearer and nearer among the forests between them and the wigwams of the Iroquois.

Lyra had long since put away the big Dutch Bible, and she had busied herself with other books as well as with her needle; but Polly asked her:

"What did you try to read Dutch for?"

She thought a moment before replying:

“Well, I did n’t, but I ’d read everything else there was in the house. I just wish, and wish, and wish I had something new to read.”

Her face told more than her words did of her hungry longing, but there was a kind of loving pride in the way her mother said:

“I wish you had them, Lyra. You ’re the very girl that ought to have them. You will, too, some day, after the war is over—if the redskins do n’t burn up everything.”

“Oh, how I wish I could know what ’s going on,” and there Lyra paused, for her candle was in her hand and she too had a ladder to climb, to her own bit of a room in the block-house upper story of that fort-dwelling, and Dan had already passed through to the pallet he was to sleep on in the kitchen.

Lyra was thinking of the great world and of lands beyond the sea, where there were kings and queens, and palaces, and pictures, and libraries, and all the wonderful things that did not belong to a settler’s life; but her mother was thinking of things nearer at hand.

“Hark!” she exclaimed.

"That 's York," said Polly.

"What a howl!" added Lyra.

"Hoot! Who? Whoo-oo?" replied the disturbed owl in the kitchen; but he was speaking to Dan, and all the reply he obtained came from Jake, just entering the door:

"Shut up, will ye? Dan, what do ye s'pouse is the matter with that dog?"

"Smelled something," said Dan. "If he howls again I 'll go out."

"The patrol 's gone to the village," said Jake. "They 're makin' more fuss! No redskins are 'round, anyhaow. I 'm goin' up to bed. Got to cut the rest o' that corn to-morrer."

His nerves, at least, had not been shaken by any terror of tomahawks and red warriors, and he quietly went up the loom-oom ladder, to find his candle left burning for him.

"Did you fetch up your gun?" came from Mr. Prindle, beyond the partition.

"Gun? No," replied Jake. "I ain't afraid o' you, long 's you have n't yer sowl with ye. What do I want of any gun up in this crib?"

“We’ve got to be prepared,” said the schoolmaster solemnly. “They’ve been stirring up the hostility of the aborigines.”

“So they have,” responded Jake. “And I do hope Sullivan ’ll git in amongst ’em one o’ these days and reconcile every last one on ’em. Pity we can’t reconcile this ’ere Tuskyroarer and his squaw. Two ounces o’ buckshot ’d do it.”

Prindle said no more, but he groaned a little when the candle went out.

“There!” muttered Dan, listening at the kitchen door. “I know what that howl means. He’s calling for me to come.”

There had been a plaintive, enquiring sound in the voice of the mastiff-bloodhound, and Dan may have understood it rightly. At all events, he walked out into the starlight, gun in hand, just as York came over the fence from the pasture, followed, or rather passed, by something that whizzed on until it fell on the ground at Dan’s feet.

“That ’s it!” he exclaimed as he picked it up. “They’ve got to kill off the dogs first, if they’re going to surprise the village. Now I know what

became of Dr. Hawkins's dogs, and some others too."

York had not been hurt as yet, but he was the best watch-dog in Plum Hollow, and the thing Dan held in his hand was a flint-headed arrow.

"A real warrior would n't ha' done that," remarked Dan coolly. "He 'd ha' known better than to give us a warning."

"Woof-oof! Woof! Wough!" roared York savagely, glaring toward the fence, but Dan assured him:

"They won't come this time. Down! down! They won't even whoop, and I guess it is n't the Tuscarora."

He was walking rapidly toward the fence, and no whoop came, nor another arrow, but as Dan peered between the rails he whispered eagerly:

"I saw him! Let him run. I saw the Tuscarora too, sneaking back to the barn. I 'll take York in and bar the doors. It is n't any war-party yet; nothing but scouts and spies."

He spoke very confidently, and York followed him into the house like a dog who felt that his own

work was done and that he was entirely satisfied. He could not read a book at all, but there were other things that he could read, better than the most learned man. Dan, on the other hand, might perhaps be a trial to the master of the village school, but he had attended another, among the cunning teachers of the Six Nations, and he had been forced to study hard and learn fast. He was as far beyond the A B C primer in the regular course of forest teaching as if he had been an unusually promising young Seneca or Cayuga chief, instead of a Plum Hollow schoolboy in danger of being flogged by Mr. Prindle for playing truant.

Perhaps the most curious part of it all was that Dan and York studied the flint-headed arrow together for a minute or so, and then lay down and went to sleep. York did so without any remarks whatever, and Dan only said:

“Guess I ’d better tell the Squire about it in the morning, but I won’t tell Lyra nor Mrs. Warner.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE RED SPY'S MESSAGE.



LUM HOLLOW was a pretty dark place on a moonless night. The days of street lamps had not come, and tallow-dip candles at a few scattered windows of seven-by-nine green glass do not spare much radiance for out-of-door purposes. There was reason, therefore, in the saying of some of the villagers, that the only night patrols good for anything were the dogs. They said that even the Indians in their wigwams kept no other sentinels. Nevertheless, during that night after the arrival of a rumor, men tramped again and again up and down the village street, ready armed to meet and question any other arrival. Everywhere they went they set the dogs barking, and people came hurriedly to windows to peer out and be dreadfully startled, until some stentorian voice replied to them:

“Night watch! All ’s well!” and then the dogs barked again, and folk of all sizes went back to their beds and, perhaps, to dream a little.

A camp-fire, or a fort-fire, was still burning in the broad parade-ground of Plum Hollow Fort, and a sentry paced back and forth near it, but there were no other signs of a garrison. There had been a small nervous beginning of military precautions against surprise, but that was all.

The dogs were restless that night, and seemed to be calling to and answering one another, but their human friends could not understand what they were saying.

It was only a little before dawn, however, that York arose, stretched himself, put a huge paw upon Dan van Lennep’s arm, and very plainly whimpered to him:

“Up! Get up! Mo-o-rning!”

“Dark as a pocket,” replied Dan, as he sprang to his feet. “What ’s the matter with you, old fellow? I won’t light any candle.”

York was at the door, pawing and seeming to keep down a muffled growl, but Dan did not at

once let him out. The first morning duty seemed to be to rake out the ashes in the fireplaces and throw on wood, and Dan did so, saying:

“There ’ll have to be a fresh back-log in the front room, but the others ’ll last through the day. By the time Polly ’s up the kitchen fire ’ll be roaring.”

York followed him from room to room, as if he understood the matter, but he seemed to be impatient. So, perhaps, was Dan, but he looked out through several shot-holes, front and rear, before he unbarred the back door.

“The arrow,” he said. “I must n’t forget that. Humph! That ’s the squaw.”

There she stood, between him and the nearest apple-trees, a shadow among shadows. She was looking at the smoke from the chimneys. If, however, she had waited for the appearance of people from the house, she no sooner saw Dan and York than she quickly retreated and another shadow came forward.

“How!” said Kho-go-na-ga. “Boy, tell gun man great chief here!”

There had been a change in him, or at least in his manner and tone. He had not improved his dress, but he had put on a haughtiness very different from the quiet and almost neighborly style he had worn the previous evening.

“How!” said Dan carelessly. “They ’ll be out pretty soon. You can’t go into the house just yet.”

“Woo-oo-oof!” growled York, with very intelligent fierceness, as the red man made a forward movement, and Kho-go-na-ga wisely replied:

“Great chief wait. Heap want see old gun man.”

The Squire was at that moment seeing him, as well as the very dim dawnlight permitted, and so was Jake Dunbar, and the latter was saying:

“Something ’s up, Squire. Dan ’s on his guard. Hear York?”

“That dog hates redskins,” replied the gunsmith. “Dan, come here a moment.”

Kho-go-na-ga stood still, but so did York, in front of him, while Dan went into the house again; but the latter did not say anything until he had pulled out from a cranny in the logs something that he handed to the Squire.

“Where did that come from, Dan?” asked Jake.
“Was you aout again last night?”

The Squire’s eyes asked the same questions, and Dan replied:

“They ’re sneaking around to kill the dogs. That was fired at York. Just grazed him. I ’d no chance to shoot back. Guess the Tuscarora does n’t know all ’bout it. But he knows that some other Indian ’s around.”

“It ’s a warning,” said the gunsmith. “I ’ll hide it. I ’ll speak to that rascal now. Do n’t come out, mother. Tell Polly to get breakfast for him and the squaw. We must be rid of them.”

Dan’s early stirring around had aroused the house, and Polly was at her fire, but the first remarks made by Kho-go-na-ga to his host declared that he would have “heap talk” after breakfast, and not before. Meantime he would stay outside the house and look around.

“They won’t let ye poke ’round the village, nor nigh the fort,” Jake told him. “You ’d best keep ’round here.”

“Ugh!” growled the Indian. “Great chief go where like. Pale-face talk too big.”

“Not onless your hide ’ll keep out buckshot,” said Jake recklessly. “This ’ere is n’t your wigwam.”

“Look out, Jake,” whispered Dan. “Best to humor him just now.”

“No, ’t is n’t,” replied Jake. “The wust garrison for Plum Holler is cowardyce.”

It would naturally be supposed that such a settlement could not contain much of that kind of garrison. It certainly was a strange residence for any weak-nerved man to select. Perhaps there was even too little of prudent perception of the presence of danger, for every farmhouse in the valley was astir very much as usual that morning. In almost every household, also, it was asserted in one form or another that there was really no end to those rumors of what the Indians were going to do. The settlement had been scared scores of times, and there had not been a war-whoop near it since the mills and the fort were built.

It was a very peaceful-looking place that morning,

and so was another village, of a very different style of architecture, many a long mile to the westward.

Here, too, there were a river and a little lake, but there was neither dam nor mill. There were a street and side streets, all very narrow and crooked, but no fences, no wheel-tracks in the middle nor sidewalks at the edges.

Some of the one-story houses were fairly well built of logs, but more of them were only comfortable huts of bark and skins, and there was neither church, schoolhouse, nor blacksmith-shop.

There were very good-looking cornfields, dotted with pumpkins and squashes. Cattle and horses were to be seen here and there, but the greatest stock of animal life seemed to be a lot of worthless, savage-looking dogs. As for the human population, it must have been as large as that of Plum Hollow, and it was out-of-doors all at once, as if nobody cared to stay in house or hut or wigwam after waking in the morning.

So, without the appearance of anything unpeaceful, or even of any immediate industry beyond fire-building and cooking, there were everywhere life

and movement, for this was one of the principal villages of the Onondagas, and it lay but a few miles south of the ever-burning Sacred Fire and Great Council House of that tribe and of the entire confederacy of the Six Nations.

There must, moreover, have been something of special interest or expectation, for the squaws cooked with energy; the numerous children, of all sizes above that of pappoose, hurried to meet each other, and to chatter in subdued tones that might not reach the ears of their elders; while tall, solemn-faced warriors stalked hither and thither, and some of them seemed even to be bearing messages to wigwam after wigwam.

It might well be a comfortable and safe-feeling community, whatever the news arriving, for tradition declared that never, at any time, had the foot of a foeman, red or white, penetrated the hunting-grounds of the Iroquois as far as the valley of the Ti-ough-ne-au-ga, the lakes of its source, or the forests that guarded the Sacred Fire.

Not only was this the heart and political centre of the great savage confederacy which claimed all

the region between the great lakes and the Ohio as its own, by conquest or inheritance, but this was guarded by the tribe whose warriors boasted that they were the fiercest, the tallest in stature, the darkest in face, the most subtle in council, and the most merciless in war, of all the allied tribes.

If Dan van Lennep had any chores to do that morning, they were turned over to somebody else, for it seemed hardly any time at all before he was in the shop. He had the fire in the forge going, and in the middle of it sat the bowl of an iron ladle half full of pieces of lead.

“I can run loads o’ bullets before school-time,” he remarked. “But what a big mould that is. They ’ll weigh more ’n half an ounce apiece. The Squire ’ll fit on the stock o’ that rifle to-day. Then I ’ll see how it ’ll shoot. Wish I owned it. Every fellow ought to have a gun.”

The gunsmith was out at the gate, talking with a knot of substantial-looking men, mostly elderly, and Jake was at the barn. The squaw was sitting very humbly, as became her, at the kitchen doorstep, but her lord and master, after eating his breakfast in

sullen silence, and after smoking a pipe, was stalking haughtily back and forth along the walk through the back yard. It was plain that he had something on his mind, and almost any observer would have agreed with Jake that "that critter's got mischief in him," even if they did not add, as he did, "and it ort to be follered home by abaout a foot o' cold iron or a slug o' lead."

Mr. Prindle had gone to the village, but Jake and York, whatever else they did, kept an eye on the Tuscarora, until they saw him stride forward into the shop, followed pretty closely by Squire Warner and his squad of Plum Hollow citizens.

"Guess I 'll go too," said Jake, "and l'arn what that there viper's up to. He's all killin' riled because we won't let him go spyin' 'round the village and the fort."

The inside of the house was very still indeed. Polly, in the kitchen, sang only now and then, and in a low, uncertain kind of way, as if hardly any tune she knew exactly fitted her frame of mind. In the next room neither the loom nor the spinning-

wheel seemed to have anything to do. It was as if they had folded their hands and sat down to wait for more flax or wool to come.

Just after the Squire went out of the house to meet his neighbors, however, there had been a quick-voiced, earnest conversation in the front room. It began with:

“Why, mother, what are you doing?”

“O Lyra, I forgot. I did n't mean to let you know. But it 's just as well.”

“Melting lead, mother?” exclaimed Lyra, opening her eyes. “Has anything happened? Is anything going to happen?”

“God protect us, dear!” replied her mother. “See that arrow? It was fired at York and Dan last night. Your father says he 'd forgotten about bullets. There 's buckshot enough, but some of the guns have n't a ball to fit them. Different sizes, you know. Pistols, too. Dan 's at work in the shop. Word 's going 'round the village for everybody to run all the lead they can get hold of. They found some houses without enough to last for a day's hunting.”

“O mother! And what if the Indians should come before we ’re ready?”

“They may not come at all, but we need n’t all be murdered just by our own carelessness,” said Mrs. Warner. “That ’s a dozen for that size. I ’ll let the mould cool and take another.”

“It ’s such slow work,” said Lyra. “I ’ll stay at home from school and help.”

“No, you need n’t,” said her mother. “I can do without you. Besides, your father and I both want to know what the other girls say. We ’ve all been asleep. How I wish Silas were here!”

“With his whole company,” exclaimed Lyra. “And a cannon!”

It seemed to do Mrs. Warner good, and Lyra, too, to pour molten metal and then to see the silvery globes and cones drop out upon the floor. These, however, were all of small sizes, for rifles whose range could not be long, however accurately they might throw their pellets.

Spinning, weaving, bullet-moulding—strangely varied were the household employments along the old frontier!

In the shop Dan was working steadily, for he also seemed to have more than one pair of moulds, but his best industry was given to the larger size, for the short rifle-barrel that was now once more in the vise, ready for the work that was to complete it.

The Squire was not at the work-bench, however, for he stood in the middle of the shop, confronting the rigidly erect form and cloudy face of his Indian guest.

“Kho-go-na-ga great chief!” declaimed the savage proudly. “Heap big brave me! Old gun man hear what he say!”

“Talk right along,” replied the Squire, very quietly, as if he were entirely used to that kind of eloquence.

“Kho-go-na-ga want gun,” said the red man, pointing from one piece to another that leaned against the wall. “Want powder. Want bullet. Bring heap beaver skin some day. Old gun man let chief have heap gun?”

“Guess not,” came in a mutter from the tightening lips of Jake, near the door. “He can go to the British for his guns. He knows he can’t get ’em

here. I can see what he 's up to." But the Squire replied:

"No, you can't have any gun nor any ammunition. Talk along."

Kho-go-na-ga may not have expected quite so prompt and firm a refusal, but he glared fiercely from face to face of those around him, for a moment, and then turned and pointed a hand and finger at Dan van Lennep, and said, as if he were giving an order:

"Old gun man say, 'No gun.' Heap old fool. Kho-go-na-ga great chief! Want boy. Take back to tribe. On-on-da-ga own boy. Run away. Old gun man give boy?"

"That's it!" exclaimed Jake. "And they'd torter Dan and then come and skelp every boy and gal and baby in Plum Holler!" But again the Squire was calm.

"Kho-go-na-ga big fool," he said, in a tone of contempt. "Dan 's a white boy, not a redskin."

"No give up boy?" interrupted the dark-visaged savage threateningly. "What old gun man say? Then heap warrior come to Plum Hollow."

“Come along,” said the Squire. “Guess you ’d come, anyhow, if you wanted to. Do n’t see why you should take the trouble to pick a quarrel. There ’s all the quarrel you need on hand. Kho-go-na-ga heap bad Indian. Go home!”

“Kho-go-na-ga say, ‘Friend.’ Say want gun. Say want boy. Old gun man say, ‘No, go home.’ Great chief all alone now. Come again some day. Bring tribe. Burn town. What say then?”

“I ’d say I ’d ort to ha’ plugged ye this time,” growled Jake, “but I s’paise they won’t let me. Tell ye what, though, you reptyle, you travel! If I ketch ye in the woods anywhar ’round here, I ’ll let drive soon ’s I sight ye. Do ye understand that?”

He had a gun in his hand, and he patted the stock of it with one hand, while he pointed toward the woods with the other.

Squire Warner himself silently repeated the motion of dismissal, and the red man stalked out of the shop and beckoned to his squaw. In a moment more they were in the road, on their way to the little bridge.

“It ’s all put on,” remarked the gunsmith. “He came to spy, that ’s all.”

Up to that moment Dan had not turned his head from his bullet moulding, nor had he expressed a sign of interest in what was going on; but now he put down his ladle and said:

“Squire, he did n’t know I was here till the squaw told him. I heard her. She ’s an Oneida. She saw me at the war-dance. He was n’t there. Guess he is a chief, though.”

“He was mad because he saw that he was found out for us by Dan,” added Jake. “I ’ll go and cut corn for a while, but I wish every cut went into a redskin.”

He swung himself out of the shop in an angry way, gun in one hand, corn-knife in the other; but one of the neighbors looked after him and said:

“They say Jake fought well up at the Stillwater fight. Should n’t wonder if there was a kind o’ captain in him. What do ye say, Walt Hawley?”

The only young man in the shop had but just entered it, and was passing through toward the house, and he paused only long enough to reply:

“We ’re awful short ’o captain timber. I ’m for Captain Warner, with Jake for lieutenant, and we have n’t any other scout half so good as Dan van Lennep.”

“That ’s partly so,” said an older man, but he and his friends walked slowly away toward the village, and the gunsmith turned silently to the weapon in his vise, while Dan as silently chopped up another bar of lead; but there was an old, old look once more upon his face, and his eyes seemed to be really gazing at something a great distance beyond that slug of bullet metal.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO COUNCILS.



TALL, lean, tough-looking young fellow was Walter Hawley. He must have been still in his teens, but his freckled, sun-burned face had been bold enough in its expression while he was talking with the men in the shop. Sandy-haired young fellows, with Roman noses and with pluck enough to ride post along the border, all alone, are apt to speak out, for themselves or for the other boys. Just now, however, Walter seemed to have very nearly lost his tongue. His complexion was changing, too, until it was nearly the color, although not the shade, of Jacob Dunbar's hair. In fact, he was breaking down with bashfulness in the presence of two women and a girl.

“What!” exclaimed Mrs. Warner. “What did you say about giving up Dan to the redskins?”

“Sakes alive!” added Polly, with tremendous

energy and an angry shake of the cleaver with which she had been dividing deer-meat.

“Walter Hawley!” was all that Lyra found breath for. But he made a struggle against all their indignation and succeeded in replying, stammeringly:

“Well, Mrs. Warner, I came up from the village. Wanted to hear ’bout Sile, you know. That redskin was in the shop. I heard them. He’s gone. Squaw’s gone, too. They want Dan, to burn him.”

“They can’t have him,” almost screamed Mrs. Warner. “I’d rather die! Do n’t you know they murdered all his family?”

“Guess they did,” stammered Walter. “He ’s the only one left, I suppose——”

“And you think they might as well havè him?” interrupted Mrs. Warner, as if ready to burst with astonishment and scorn.

“Well, no,” said Walter, looking at the floor and then at the ceiling. “I ’m with Jake ’bout that. We ought to shoot this fellow that ’s here, that asked for Dan. Every redskin counts. We ’ve got to kill ’em all some day, and we ’d never ought to miss a chance.”

“Oh, that’s what you mean!” said Polly, very much relieved. “You ’d never ought to shoot one, unless he ’s a-shootin’ right at ye. But there, we can’t give up a white boy nohow.”

“I ’m going back to the village,” said Walter. “They ’re mending the fort. Some o’ the posts in the stockade were rotten. They ’d ha’ let a bullet right through. Did Sile have anything much to say?”

Of course he had, and his mother was proud to say it for him, but Walter did not again recover his tongue. Even when Lyra said something about its being time for her to go to school, she did but thereby send him out of the house in a hurry. Not that he was also going to school, but there was a strong suggestion that he would much rather have faced Kho-go-na-ga, or any other Indian, than have been seen walking into Plum Hollow with the gunsmith’s pretty daughter.

Dan ceased his bullet-making and set out for the schoolhouse, but he did so without saying another word to the gunsmith. Not until he was out of the shop, however, did the latter turn away from the

job in his vise and say to himself, with a long, hard breath:

“I just could n’t speak. No more could he. Maybe Jake’s right. Is there any use in showing mercy to wild beasts that ask such things as that, and threaten to scalp us if we won’t do it?”

“What’s this about Daniel van Lennep?” suddenly exclaimed a voice in the side doorway.

“Nothing, Hannah,” said her husband grimly, “except that we know, now, which of the tribes claims him. He was with the Onondagas.”

“And they demand him?”

“No, they do n’t. They might, but this vagabond Tuscarora——”

“Is n’t he a chief, father?” asked Lyra.

“I do n’t care how many chiefs he is,” growled the gunsmith. “They shoot white spies in all armies, but there ’d be a dreadful fuss made if we should shoot a redskin spy—just as if they ’d spare one of ours! I ’m getting sick of some things.”

“I could n’t see a human being murdered in cold blood,” replied Mrs. Warner. “We must n’t forget that the Indians are men and women.”

“I do n’t know,” slowly growled the indignant Squire. “Anyhow, I must finish this rifle. Hannah, just you go and mould bullets. Lyra had better go to school.”

With a heavy, weary step Mrs. Warner went back to the house. All around her was comfort, ease, abundance, according to the ways of farm life on the border; but she cast nervous glances toward the barn, and then toward the road. Lyra was already out of sight when her mother paused, before going into the house, and exclaimed:

“Seems to me as if I were all the while listening for war-whoops, or for somebody screeching. Oh, what awful screaming there must have been in the Wyoming Valley!” and she put her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out some awful sight.

There was not a sign of trouble in or about Plum Hollow. Everybody was at work as usual, and the hum of voices in the village school came out through windows left wide open in the hazy warmth of an Indian-summer day.

Even more quiet was the appearance of things in the other village, among the little lakes at the head

of the Ti-ough-ne-au-ga. It had almost a deserted look before the middle of the forenoon, for the road leading out of it northward had been one long procession of eager-looking men and women. Indian warriors first, then boys, then squaws and girls. It was a bright, cheerful, expectant kind of time, for they were all going to a grand entertainment. They had started early because they had miles and miles to walk, but then the entertainment was not to begin until noon.

Unless one understood the rough, harsh dialect, that hardly became musical, even on the tongues of matrons and maidens, nothing could have been learned from the varied conversations. An observer, rather than a hearer, however, might have gathered something by going on in advance. If he had gone on to a point toward which the procession from several villages converged, he would have understood that there was something like a national gathering.

There was a wide, open space, in the centre of which was a long, well-made wigwam of logs, and in and out of this walked warriors in all the glory of

war-paint, feathers, medals, and the pride of conscious power.

Not far from the front of the Great Council Wigwam stood a row of a score of horses, and by the head of each horse stood a man in a red uniform, while a little in front of the line stood one young man, alone, in somewhat weather-beaten scarlet.

Out from the door of the wigwam, angrily, hot-faced, strode a powerful-looking man, in a much more brilliant uniform, and a pair of bedizened red men who followed seemed trying to detain him.

“White chief stay,” said one in very good English. “Talk more. No ask so much. See what do.”

“See what you do!” roared the officer. “No! I ’d die first. No!”

His face was livid as he reached the line of horses.

“Mount!” he shouted to the men. “Murray, my boy, I ’ve failed. They won’t spare the prisoners. We must go.”

“Great heavens!” exclaimed the younger officer. “What, Major? All? Men? Women? Children?”

“Nineteen, all told,” replied the Major, almost weeping. “See those stakes yonder? Fire! Tor-

ture! All the horrors they can do. I saw some of the women. O my God! I've done all I could! I would n't stay within hearing. Mount, my boy! I'm going wild!"

He looked it, the brave, honorable British soldier that he was, but the men were already in their saddles.

"Major Shelton," and now a third white man was with them, not in uniform, coming from the Council, "wait a moment. This is bad policy. We may lose our hold upon the Six Nations. We must not oppose——"

"You did n't, you miscreant!" hurled back the furious officer. "If you had stood by me, I might have saved some of them. Their blood be on your head, Mr. Agent, not on mine. You are a born American, too, such as you are! I'm off!"

"I shall hold you accountable," began the agent, with a bitter expression upon his swarthy, callous-looking face. "It is my duty to the king to keep the tribes——"

"You! Teach me my duty?" fiercely interrupted the Major. "My king is not served by the

torture of prisoners. Silence! Do n't speak to me! Ride, Murray. I 'm bursting!"

The young officer was evidently moved deeply, for a shaken fist and a bitter word of wrath and contempt was his farewell to the cringing agent, around whom several chiefs were now grouping.

Off dashed the little cavalcade at a quick canter, but it had not gone far before Major Shelton said, hotly:

"I begged permission to come. Our best men believe as I do, Murray. I am right. The last chance to win back America was lost when we joined with the savages. We never had any defeat that hurt us like the Wyoming affair."

"It is n't war," growled Murray, and the Major responded:

"Indeed it is not. Those torture stakes! What British officer wishes to rank as a fellow-scalper and woman-burner with Ta-yen-da-na-ga and his red friends? I 've washed my hands of it, if they take my scalp before I can report to Cornwallis."

So far, therefore, as could be understood, there was to be but one so-called white man present at

the grand entertainment to which so many children of the woods were gathering. If there was any other, or others, yet to appear, even he was shut out from the Council House during what seemed to be a long two hours. Chiefs, and chiefs only, could have been permitted to take part in so stately an assembly, and there was no reporter present to take note of the eloquence, the wisdoms, or the decisions of what was practically the Senate of the Iroquois.

An entirely different kind of council had been held by the settlers of Plum Hollow. This council had not been gathered in any one place, but had been scattered among all the homesteads, and places of business, and among the cornfields and cattle-pens. Perhaps the largest sections of it had met at the tavern and on a street corner, until just as school-time arrived and the children, older and younger, came trooping to the log schoolhouse. They had no time for arguments, to be sure, for Mr. Prindle stood in the doorway and blew long and loudly upon a somewhat battered but still musical tin horn. No scholar under his searching eye and acquainted with his faithful rod was likely to pause

for useless conversation while that horn was sounding. There was something marvellous, and there always is, in the rapidity with which the entire village had learned the latest news. Everybody was aware of the demand made by Kho-go-na-ga for guns, powder, and lead, and Dan van Lennep. It was a little curious, too, how many of the younger men, with several who were gray-headed, put some form or other of the question :

“Why did n't Jake Dunbar shoot him? He was there!” And they generally added: “I 'd ha' thought he would. It 'd ha' been jest like him. There 's shoot in Jake.”

He was at work in the Warner cornfield, with the energy of a man who has his blood up. His heavy corn-knife swept through the stiffest hill-bunches of corn-stalks at one sweeping cut, and at times he paused a moment and breathed hard and angrily. All the fun-loving look had gone out of his sun-burned, healthy face, and any one looking at him would have been ready to accept the current opinion of his neighbors.

Down at the schoolhouse things went on as usual,

after work began. The hum went out through the windows with great regularity, as has been said, but not everything was just exactly as usual, after all.

There was a difference in Mr. Prindle and there was a difference in Dan.

For some reason, neither boy nor girl had spoken to Dan, until the class in arithmetic was called. They had looked at him a great deal, and almost as if they were half afraid of him. Mr. Prindle himself had looked at him a number of times, and once or twice when he did so, he seemed to come very near bowing, as if Dan had somehow or other acquired a title to especial respect. It is true that the Indians themselves were known to absolutely pamper a doomed captive waiting his turn to run the gauntlet, but Mr. Prindle was not an Indian. Neither could he have been too much influenced by the fact that Dan read, wrote, ciphered, and answered questions wonderfully, as if he knew it all by heart. Even Lyra Warner looked at him with surprise several times, and said to herself:

“It’s just as if he had learned it all in some other school, long ago, and was only remembering back.”

That might be, but no one even whispered to Dan until that arithmetic class stood up to recite before the blackboard. Just as they did so, a little mite of a girl in a front seat held up her tiny hand, according to rule, and Mr. Prindle dignifiedly responded:

“What is it?”

“Please, sir, are they goin’ to send Dan to the Injins?”

The schoolmaster looked, for a moment, as if he had been taken suddenly ill, but he recovered himself and stood very firmly erect while he replied:

“Sit down! It is impossible to determine, immediately, what individual sacrifices may be required by a policy of judicious conciliation.”

Every child in the school should have been satisfied with so large-sized a reply as that, but little Johnny Humphrey held up his hand, and got right up with it to say, loudly:

“And pop he says that ef they do give him up, ther village ort to be burned und skelped, too. He said he was goin’ to lick Jake Dunbar fur not a-shootin’ thet thur redskin.”

“Sit down!” commanded the schoolmaster. “The

class 'll go on. Daniel, take your books and go home. Your presence disturbs the exercises."

It was already drawing near the noon recess, and there was a buzz of discontent as Dan obeyed, for there had been great counting among the youngsters, as to what they would say, and what he would say, when they could get at him on the playground. He even hurried his departure, however, and the last words he heard in the schoolroom were in a fierce whisper from little Johnny Humphrey :

"Do n't ye go ter the Injins, Dan. Jest come ter aour haouse und pop 'll keep ye!"

Under any other circumstances that might have been a call for prompt discipline, but Mr. Prindle did but raise to a louder key the voice in which he was commenting upon the "sums" scored on the broad blackboard.

Every one of them was vitally incorrect. The Plum Hollow children could neither add, subtract, nor multiply, that morning.

They were not divided in their opinions, however, nor were the older people, who were collecting each other's ideas all around the settlement. Lyra War-

ner found herself gathering, for her report to her father, the assurance of all the boys and girls of Plum Hollow that:

“That ’s the way our folks think, ’specially mother. She says the Injins are just as ready to burn up one feller as they are to burn another, and we can keep our guns and powder to shoot back with.”

CHAPTER IX.

HOMESTEAD AND VILLAGE.



HERE could be no doubt that Abner Warner, the Plum Hollow gunsmith, had worked long and thoughtfully upon the peculiar-looking rifle which he was now loosening from his vise. Even the stock which he was to fit it into had an elaborate appearance.

“There!” he said. “I believe it’ll beat any other gun I ever made. It’s heavy enough, without being too heavy. Wish I could go out and try it, but I can’t. I must put every shooting iron about this shop into good order, though. There’s no telling how soon we may need ’em all. Glad there’s more powder and lead coming. But that’s a bully rifle, or I’m mistaken.”

Out in the cornfield Jake was standing still, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, and some-

what critically studying the long-barrelled, wide-mouthed weapon which leaned against the rail fence near him.

“No,” he said aloud, “I do n’t want any bayonet. They ’re good enough, too, for some fellers. But if I come to close quarters with any redskin, all I keer for is a long knife, like this ’ere.”

It was not the cutlass-looking corn-knife, for that was sticking up from the yellow rind of a big pumpkin; but he had drawn from his belt, while speaking, a long, bright, slightly curved and somewhat heavy-looking blade, and he evidently admired it.

“Sharp as a razor,” he remarked. “Fust-rate temper. Jest the right weight. Why, if I had a good clip, I could take a feller’s head clean off. Dao n’t knaow but what I could clip him in two.”

Nobody else could have told him, without first measuring the man to be clipped, and that long knife would have been a less terrible weapon in a weaker hand, for its “jest the right weight” was a trifle heavy for most men. As for its comparison with a bayonet, that could hardly be made with fairness, unless the other kind of weapon were also to be

handled by arms and hands as sinewy as were those of the stalwart frontiersman.

“I ’ve wrestled some,” he again muttered reflectively, “and I never met the redskin I could n’t put on his back. They don’t seem to hev the real iron in ’em.”

There was truth in that. Man for man, size for size, weight for weight, the white man has more strength than the savage, if the white men selected are the axemen of the border, trained from infancy to feats of strength, while inheriting the bone and muscle which have made our own the pioneer race of all the world.

Jake put the long knife back into the sheath and picked up the corn-knife, but before he again attacked the rapidly diminishing rows before him he gave his own opinion of the rifle question.

“It’s no great use,” he said, “to hev a piece thet ’ll carry too fur—except you ’re shootin’ across water, or onto cleared land. You never git long ranges in the woods. Besides, fightin’ redskins ’mongst brush, or in the evenin’ light, what you want to do is to throw all the lead you kin throw and let it scatter some.”

He was considering only such guns as he was acquainted with, but he was setting forth, without knowing it, the main points of the long contest between smooth-bore muskets and new-fangled rifles, which was not finally decided, for army purposes, until three generations later. On he went, and the severed stalks were cleared rapidly away before the sweeping strokes of his corn-knife. Just such work was going on in many another field around Plum Hollow, while in the village itself there was even an increase of the outward appearance of hazy, lazy, comfortable, Indian-summer peace and quiet.

There was a sound of singing in the kitchen part of the Warner homestead, for Polly Sackett was busily shining up her milk-pans, and seemed to know what hymns or ballads were appropriate to each pan. At all events, no hymn or ballad went over from one pan to another. There was always a change in the music.

A clatter from the next room told that the loom was at work, but a low voice came out of the clatter, remarking:

“So sorry I have n’t any more lead. I’d rather

be moulding bullets. To think of their asking us to give them guns and powder! And to give up Dan!"

The barn-yards had a lonely look, except for the poultry, for the cows were out in one pasture lot and the horses in another. Nannie herself, forgetting the trouble she had made, was benevolently gazing at the bars of her own enclosure, as if wondering, somewhat, if they would again get down and let her out for another grand ramble in the beautiful woods.

The barns were not really lonely, for one of them, at least, was peculiarly well occupied. It was a log barn, and it would have been dark if the door had not been partly open, and if there had not been chinks here and there in the logs. Ordinarily, especially in cold weather, those chinks could be choked with tufts of hay, but if the hay was removed the barrel of a gun might be poked through. That was an old barn, and had been built when there was a greater daily possibility that people in it would need to use guns while they were attending to the cows and horses.

There was a big box-sleigh turned up at the farther

end of the barn, waiting patiently for cold weather to come. On the sleigh rested the wicker-and-lath cage containing Mr. Prindle's pet, for Polly had asserted, humanely :

"It 's bad for the eyes o' them kind o' birds to be where there's daylight. What they want is to roost in the dark."

There he sat, in apparent contentment, perhaps wishing that things looked darker than they did, and on the floor before him sat York, looking at him, and now and then whining, as if he saw something he did not understand. Something of the same kind must have been upon the mind of a fat old yellow hen who stood at the side of York and made cluttered remarks about owls in barns and their possible consequences to chickens.

"Cut-cut-cuttaw?" said the hen enquiringly.
"Cut-taw-cut?"

"Wim-im-unk!" whined York.

A loud, shrill crow from a gay chanticleer behind them disturbed even the sleepy dignity of the owl, and he replied to them all, at once, in a disgusted tone :

“Who? Hoot! Hoo-oo!” barely opening a crack in his eyes, and then shutting it.

“Woof—oof—ooo—oof!” suddenly shouted York, turning and springing toward the door.

Alas for haste and bad tactics! He sprang against the door and slammed it shut, and there was no immediate getting out, although he pawed hard to open it, barking furiously.

“Cut! cut! Queet! Cut-taw-cut!” shrieked the hen.

The rooster crowed again. The owl indulged in another hoarse, discontented hoot, but neither of them could hear, away out in the woods on the hill-side, a crackling of twigs under hasty feet and a grunting, “Ugh! Heap dog!”

York’s nose and ears may not have been rifled, but his perceptions of danger were very “long-range” affairs, and he was viciously eager to get out of that barn after somebody or other.

“Hark! Polly,” exclaimed Mrs. Warner, at her loom, “run to the shop and tell the Squire there’s something the matter with York at the barn. I’ll get a gun and load it.”

Polly ran out of the house, with a milk-pan in one hand and a scouring-cloth in the other, but the gunsmith had heard the howling, and he now stood in the shop doorway, a gun in one hand, peering under the other hand toward the barn.

“What can be the matter with that dog?” he was muttering, when a slighter, shorter form squeezed silently past him. “Dan!” said the gunsmith. “You here?”

“Prindle sent me home,” said Dan. “I ’ll take that gun, please. York has smelled a redskin.”

“Oh no, he has n’t,” said the gunsmith calmly. “They would n’t come so near in the daytime.”

“Some raw, young warrior might,” said Dan, as he looked at the priming of the gun before hurrying on toward the barn.

“O Dan,” shouted Polly, “do n’t go alone! You do n’t know how many there may be!”

“Yes, I do,” said Dan. “Do n’t you hear York? He is n’t hurt. He is n’t even fighting. The redskin is n’t near him.”

“That ’s so,” added the Squire, as he went for another weapon. “York ’s all right.”

He too was a hunter, used to hearing dog talk, and, as he again remarked, "Anybody could understand as much as that. What can be the matter?"

In the house Mrs. Warner was loading one of the extra guns, coolly and skilfully, as became a settler's wife; but Polly looked after Dan, as he went, and cut a line of a hymn right in two to say:

"Well, now, if that boy is n't gritty!"

He did not even show signs of excitement, but went straight to the barn and opened the door, greeted, as he drew near, by boisterous rejoicing from York.

Out sprang the mastiff-bloodhound, but it was only to turn his head toward the forest and send in that direction a prolonged, mournful howl.

"Gotten away, has he?" asked Dan. "Well, it is n't worth while to follow him just now. I'll tie you up, to keep you out o' danger."

"Who? Who-oo?" enquired the owl in the barn, and it almost sounded as if the old hen responded, vindictively:

"Cut-cut-cut-cut-off-his-head."

She could hardly have intended anything so cruel, unless she were speaking of the owl and thinking of lost chickens; but York was quickly tethered at his accustomed daytime post, under the apple-tree. No doubt he liked it better than the barn, for he could see around him and could bark with a more certain aim.

“He ’d gotten himself shut up in the old log barn,” explained Dan to Polly and Mrs. Warner, when he reached the kitchen door. “He wanted to get out.”

“He smelled something, Dan,” said Mrs. Warner. “I know he did.”

“He ’s pretty wide awake,” replied Dan. “They all are down to the village. Mr. Prindle said I ’d best come home.”

“Glad he did,” said Mrs. Warner; but as Dan walked over to the shop, she added: “Polly, what a look he had on his face!”

“It turns kind o’ gray sometimes,” replied Polly thoughtfully. “I ’m kind o’ ’fraid that thinkin’ o’ redskins makes him call to mind something.”

“Do n’t speak of it, Polly,” said the gunsmith’s

wife. "Neither you nor I can guess what that boy has had to look at. Do n't you understand? It was a kind of broken-hearted look."

If that were so, Squire Warner himself did not see it. He had returned to his work-bench, and he did not take his eyes from the pieces of gun-lock in his hand, while Dan reported concerning York.

"Prowling around, are they?" quietly remarked the Squire, as he oiled the spring. "We 're used to that. I 've a notion there 's less of it, though, than there was last year. They 're always around, more or less, in the fall o' the leaf."

"That 's their worst time," said Dan. "They say the game 's a little scarce, though."

"And that means their hunting-parties turn into war-parties," thought the Squire aloud. "It 's red-skin nature. They may want the Plum Hollow cattle for their winter beef."

"They do n't care so much for plunder," began Dan; but there he paused, and the gunsmith put down his oil-can to add:

"As they do for scalps? That 's so. But they 've

got to fight hard for all they get in Plum Hollow. That Wyoming business cost them a good many warriors."

"That 's what their chiefs used to say," said Dan. "They 're losing too many."

He did not speak like a boy, and he now stood in silence while the new gun was fitted to its stock and the lock went on.

"There!" said the Squire. "I 'll tell you, Dan. I 've got to go to the village. There 's to be a kind of town meeting at the fort. I want you to go and try that rifle. See how far you can shoot and hit. Guess it is n't too heavy for you."

"Just about right," exclaimed Dan, as he handled it, but it was not by any means a light piece, and it was almost startling to see a boy of his size make such a mere plaything of it. Somehow or other, he had inherited or had developed a strength of muscle beyond his years or his weight. "I 've plenty o' bullets," he said.

"Do n't waste 'em," replied the Squire; "but you can shoot straight, and I want to hear what you say about that gun."

“I won’t take York,” said Dan, “but I’ll cross over to the woods right away after dinner.”

“Had n’t you better go up the hill?” asked the Squire. “What about the Tuscarora?”

“He and his squaw are far enough away by this time,” responded Dan. “They ’d no more errand to do. They did n’t have any, except spying ’round.”

“Or, maybe, dog killing,” remarked the gunsmith, as he put away his tools. “That arrow ’s the worst sign I’ve seen yet. I’m afraid there ’s more a-coming.”

Dan was putting bullets into a pouch at that moment, and said nothing, but another voice replied for him:

“Tell ye what, Squire, it ’s no use fooling any longer. What we Plum Holler men hev got to do, is jest to shoot on sight. There do n’t any more redskins get away from Jake Dunbar. Do ye hear, Dan?”

“Twenty-seven,” said Dan, counting his heavy leaden pellets. “I ’m going to see how far that gun ’ll send ’em.”

“Bring home another buck,” said Jake; but the

Squire's back was turned when Dan's eyes met those of the brawny frontiersman, and he did not see what a glitter was in them when Jake finished, with a harsh laugh, "Or a redskin."

"He won't meet any buck, nor any Indian either," remarked the Squire. "We need n't be alarmed about Plum Hollow yet."

"Things are goin' along jest abaout as usual," said Jake, as all three set out for the house, "but there 's no tellin' what day or hour a change may come. Anyhaow, we need n't skeer the women to death. They 're gettin' awful nervous."

"I do n't blame 'em," responded the gunsmith. "Life on this frontier 's enough to turn any woman's hair gray—or any man's either."

Not one word was said about Indians while the excellent dinner Polly had cooked was being attended to, but there was a curious idea floating around the kitchen that the people at the table were in a manner listening for sounds outside the house, even while they talked about the most commonplace matters. Once only Mrs. Warner started, a little suddenly, and asked:

“Was that York? No. I half thought I heard him.”

Lyra had taken a luncheon to school with her, and Mr. Prindle was to get his dinner in the village. Mr. Warner did not even mention his new gun, and his wife said at least all that was necessary about flax and wool and yarn, and the “leach barrel” she wished to have set up, so that she could hull a good supply of corn and make a lot of soap. It was well to have household matters to talk about; but at that very hour, away over beyond the intervening streams and lakes and forests, in a darkened cabin not far from the Great Council House of the Iroquois, a woman’s voice whispered huskily:

“That was Jared! He could n’t stand it any longer. Oh!”

A harsh, terrible cry came struggling into the cabin, followed by a chorus of triumphant whoops and yells, and she whispered again:

“Jared! Jared! Oh, why did n’t they take me first, so I would n’t have to hear! It’ll be Sam next. I’ve counted only seven yet,” and she bowed

her head as far forward as her sharply tied fetters would let her, and she seemed to be praying, for her white lips were moving and her eyes were closed.

Miles away northward a party of red-uniformed horsemen rode rapidly along a path across a sandy level on the shore of a beautiful sheet of water. Behind them, at the border of the sandy level, were long rows of wigwams, that seemed to have few occupants that day.

“Major,” asked one of the foremost horsemen, “do you suppose that thing is over yet?”

“No, my boy,” replied the Major, turning pale. “They ’ll keep it up as long as they can. I ’m trying not to think of it. I sha’n’t sleep for a week. I want to see the Ontario and get to the mouth of the Genesee as soon as I can.”

“So do I,” said his younger comrade. “Do you know what this is?”

“This?” said the Major. “It ’s the Genentaha Lake. Salt springs all around it. Great place for deer. White men ’ll make salt here some day.”

“If they ever drive out the Iroquois,” replied the lieutenant doubtfully.

“If?” exclaimed the Major. “You do n’t know the Yankees. I do. I’ve served in this war since I went up the slope of Breed’s Hill with Pitcairn, and I lay there, too, with a buckshot in each leg. They ’ll clean out the Six Nations, whatever else they do—either before peace is declared or afterward.”

“If they have the permission of king and Parliament, perhaps they may,” slowly responded the younger man. “As soon as they give up their foolish treason and their crazy idea of independence they may do something. But these Iroquois are an awful lot to fight with.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the Major. “Washington ’s an old Indian fighter. So are his best officers. If our troops were to let go of him for a few weeks, he ’d turn and wipe out the Six Nations with one hand. Did you ever see Washington?”

“No, I never did. Did you?”

“Yes, I have. I was at Princeton and at Monmouth, pretty close to him. Saw enough of him both times. Saw him before that, though, when I landed my men at Kip’s Bay, at the capture of New

York. There 's plenty of fight in Mr. George Washington, and we need n't be in any hurry about the end of this war. The redskins 'll find their time coming, too, and I hope and pray it 'll come. I 'm with the Yankees in that fight. I 'm a settler, heart and soul, so far as scalping and torturing and burning are concerned."

CHAPTER X.

THE WORK OF THE NEW RIFLE.



HERE was a bright flush on Dan's face when, not long after dinner, he went up the road toward the bridge. He carried his rifle over his left arm, almost caressingly, and every now and then he looked down at it as if asking questions as to how much it thought it could do.

"Finest gun I ever saw," he said, as he crossed the bridge, "but I do n't feel like shooting at a mark. I may see something worth taking home."

That might easily be, when the great forest before him was known to contain so many things. It was a great silence just now, to be sure, undisturbed by even the chipper of a squirrel, and Dan seemed disposed to avoid breaking the stillness by any sound of his own making.

There was a wheel-rutted path leading from the bridge, but he did not follow it far before he turned

to the right and disappeared among the trees, remarking:

“If I were a redskin I ’d watch along that road, and if I were a deer I ’d keep away from it.”

At some time or other he had learned to express himself very well; so much better than many of the village boys that they had openly disapproved of it, and Mr. Prindle himself had declared:

“The most remarkable element in his character is his disuse of colloquialisms.”

Some of the boys heard this, and it made them suspicious of Dan, but not one of them succeeded in repeating Mr. Prindle’s words when they got home. Lyra Warner came nearer than any of them, and there may have been a good explanation in her mother’s reply:

“Boys learn to talk at home, dear. Dan has n’t forgotten——” and there she ceased, for she saw that Lyra understood too much. Something had been told about the kind of home Dan had lost, and the words Mrs. Warner did not utter were, “what his mother taught him.”

He was apparently thinking of game at the pres-

ent moment—of such game as lurks in coverts, or is shy, timid, and difficult of approach. He slipped quickly from one tree to another, after peering carefully ahead and around him. He went among thickets as if he were afraid of making bushes rustle. His bare feet made no sound, and he avoided stepping on anything that might break or snap under him.

“I’ll work around toward the open,” he said to himself. “There is n’t much chance for deer, but I might—— Hullo! There’s something among those hazels, out toward the road.”

The mere wheel-track could hardly be called a road, but he was looking in that direction.

He looked, through the many colored leaves of a young maple, more than a minute, before he went down flat and began to creep forward, whispering:

“I’ve got to get nearer than this if I’m to find out what it is. That branch did shake, and I do n’t believe any deer nibbled it either.”

Crawling is slow work for man or boy, however swiftly it may be done by a mere serpent, and Dan’s forward progress was not rapid. Nevertheless, not

many boys, and not any ordinary white boy, could have seemed so to glide instead of creeping. He went through hollows, too, and among tufts of grass and weeds, if he could find them, and he could not have been seen at a dozen yards' distance.

"I can hide this rifle easier than I could a long gun," he said, as he pushed it ahead of him, while working his way around a knoll. "I must get into cover now, and squint at that branch again."

"Cover" is always a matter of first-class importance for forest people, whether they are hunting or being hunted; but about a mile away, down the creek and down the western border of Silver Lake, there was a very curious kind of cover at that very moment.

It was nearly five yards long, more than a yard wide at bottom, and it curved over until the top of it was smooth and round. At each end it bent downward in very graceful curves. Of course it was hollow, for it was made of the bark of a birch-tree, but it walked along as if it were alive, with six pairs of legs to go upon. Right ahead of it marched one pair of legs which carried nothing but the body

of a dark, squarely built man, whom the six-legged birch-bark canoe seemed to follow diligently. It was really a fine canoe, and it was only taking the usual course of all canoes when they have to go from one lake or stream to another, or around the "portages" required by rapids or falls, or even mill-dams.

"Ugh!" remarked the guiding red man, as he came to a place that suited his ideas, or which he had before selected.

The canoe halted, and six pairs of strong hands lifted it for a moment. Then all the bearers slowly sank to the earth, one side of the frail structure rested on the grass, and then it was quickly, carefully turned over.

Low-voiced exclamations and many gestures declared the satisfaction felt by the entire party at having made an important if not perilous trip unseen and undisturbed. They were at a point where a deep indentation of the lake shore was thickly grown with sweet-flag and bordered by dense bushes. It was such a little, tangled, useless bay as no white boatman, fishing along the lake,

would ever dream of entering. It was the best kind of hiding-place for a canoe which might afterward carry warriors across the water some dark night and land them, unexpectedly, within the pickets of the defenders of the village—if there were any pickets—or even within the unguarded water-front of Plum Hollow Fort itself.

Only a minute more and the canoe was sitting like a duck upon the water, among the flags, and then it was hurried along by a pair of noiseless paddles, until those who paddled were called ashore. No eye in the woods could find any trace of the dangerous craft which they had so deftly hidden, and the entire party were stepping silently away, southward, in single file, each putting his moccasined feet upon the tracks of the man ahead of him, when once more the leader exclaimed, "Ugh!"

They halted as one man, and each held up a hand and seemed to listen, but there had not been, for ordinary ears, any break in the sombre stillness.

There had been a sound, indeed, but so far away from that place that it lost itself among the tree-

trunks, and even Indian ears could not distinctly guess where it came from.

Dan van Lennep had found the "cover" he needed to look out from, and he peered forth long and cautiously. Then he crept forward and rested the barrel of his new, beautiful rifle across a fallen tree, and seemed to be taking aim.

"I can see it glitter," he muttered. "It's a medal, and there are stripes of war-paint above and below. No use! It's three, four times the range of the best bell-muzzle in the village. What! Oh, poor Walt Hawley! What a fool he is, to be scouting along in the road. He's a dead man! The red-skin is drawing a bead on him."

Not carelessly, by any means, but very watchfully, was the daring young border postman performing the duty he had volunteered for, of "scouting the woods beyond the lake, to see if that spy had gone."

He had advanced slowly, not by any means without the skill and forethought which belonged to a backwoodsman and a hunter. He had forgotten, however, the pretty obvious truth that, if there

were any danger in those woods, it would probably lurk for its prey along that very road.

Walt had seen no danger. He was entirely concealed from any eyes watching where his did. He had drawn nearer, nearer, and now a fierce, dark eye was glancing along the barrel of a musket at short, smooth-bore range, while at even a shorter distance a second lurker was fitting a flint-headed arrow to the string of a powerful bow. It looked as if all were over with Walter Hawley.

“I’ll aim a little higher,” said Dan, “but it’s no use.”

Crack! How sharp a report that rifle made! But it was followed by the duller roar of the musket, and Walter dropped upon the ground, while over him whizzed the arrow.

It was the bowman who uttered the shrill, triumphant war-whoop and sprang forward, knife in hand, to secure the trophy of victory.

“Too late! I was too far,” groaned Dan. “Poor Walt! Hullo! There he goes! Did I hit him? What!”

Yet a third report rang out, for Walter fired as

the Bowman bounded toward him, within ten paces, and there could be no missing with slugs and buck-shot, just as Jake Dunbar had argued.

Down tumbled the too hasty warrior, uttering a shrill yell of astonishment as he did so, just as his comrade, who had served as the first mark for the new rifle, struggled convulsively forward and lay still, his empty musket dropped from his forever nerveless hand.

Walter Hawley hardly moved for a moment; but it seemed only a second after Dan's loud "What!" before he was measuring the powder to reload his wonderful new gun, remarking:

"Who on earth would have thought it! I never heard of a gun throwing that far. It did, though. There he lies. Oh, but ain't I sorry they killed Walt!"

Walter himself, cool fellow that he was, was also considering the matter.

"Somebody from the village, with a rifle," he said to himself. "Prime good shot. There may be more redskins, though, and I dare n't stand up to load this 'ere long-barrelled thing. Yes, it was

one buckshot in my leg that stung me so. No great harm, but how it smarts!"

Steadily, carefully, Dan put down a bullet and primed his precious weapon, looking at it as if he were beginning to love it. Then, all ready for further action, he began to peer out again and study the signs of the situation.

"No other redskin close by," he said. "There was n't even a death-whoop, and Walt's body has n't been touched. Any Iroquois would risk his life to get a scalp after a man was down. I'll work my way to the cover that first brave was in."

He was entirely safe in doing so, as he decided when he got there.

"That medal was a good mark," he said. "My ball struck just a little one side of it. Sure death. I want his gun and ammunition. Yes, tip-top knife. First-rate tomahawk. I know him, too. He was a Cayuga chief. Oh, but won't they howl when they know he's been put under——"

There he paused and drew back. He seemed frightened, and turned pale.

"I remember," he whispered huskily. "He was

there. I saw him do it. I can see it all now. No, he won't ever scalp any more women and children."

Shuddering, shivering all over, Dan stepped across the prostrate warrior whose deeds were such a dreadful memory, and walked straight out to the road.

"Hurrah, Dan! Is that you?"

"Walt! Hurrah! I thought he 'd killed you. Get up and load."

"There! Yes, I can stand," replied Walter, rising a little slowly. "I must bandage it, but I can walk home, I guess. Nothing but a buckshot across the calf o' my leg."

"Load, load!" persisted Dan. "These fellows did n't come here alone. You must get right along, if you are hurt."

"There!" said Walter, trying his leg again. "It is n't bad. What 'll I bandage it with?"

"Nothing like buckskin," said Dan, but his knife was already out, and he was cutting a long wide strip from the well-tanned buckskin shirt of the dead brave. "You 'll walk better after it 's tied up."

“Of course I will,” said Walter, going to work at his wound. “But we must get away from this.”

“I’ll pick up things,” said Dan. “We must n’t leave even the bow and arrows.”

“What can we do with them?” asked Walter. “They’re worth nothing to a white man.”

“I’ll keep ’em, then,” replied Dan, as he tied them up in a parcel. “You keep his hatchet and knife. The other wolf’s gun’s a good one. Ready?”

It was hardly a minute more before they were ready, all but loading the captured musket and Walter’s gun. When that was done they set out through the woods at a very good pace, considering how much smarting was going on in the calf of Walter’s left leg.

The canoe sitting in the water among the rushes had hardly been more motionless than the squad of Indians that had served it for legs during one long breathing spell while they listened so intently.

“One—two—three. Ugh!” counted the chief. “Come!”

Not another word was said, but it was plain that

three gun reports, however faint and distant, did not belong to any kind of hunting known to those woods. Deer do not shoot back, and three hunters were not likely to find game for each to shoot at in the same minute. There was therefore a skirmish of some kind, and they at once broke into the springing, steady "lope" of Indian runners. It is not a very rapid pace, after all, but it is one which can be kept up mile after mile without over-fatigue. The direction taken at first was nearly in a bee-line toward the apparent source of the sounds which had startled them, and the very distance seemed to take away the need of immediate caution.

They were pretty well armed, so far as bows and arrows went, but only the chief carried a gun. It had been as well, perhaps, for the canoe-bearers to bring very little other load around the long "portage" of the Silver Lake rapids and mill-dam.

"How do you feel, Walt?" asked Dan, at the end of about half a mile. "Does your leg hurt you?"

"I can get there," said Walter cheerfully. "Guess we 're safe."

“Of course we are,” replied Dan, with a sharp look behind them. “But I ’m not going to the village. I ’d better scout along this side of the lake.”

“You ’ll lose your scalp if you do,” exclaimed Walter. “I can’t go along with you, either.”

“No, I won’t,” replied Dan positively. “Our firing would draw any redskins out to that place. You go ahead and stop at Squire Warner’s.”

“I will,” said Walter.

“And tell Jake I can’t come back by this way. I want him to come over after me after dark, just above the dam. I ’ll show a light, so he can see it. He ’ll know how to manage. Keep his boat out o’ shot from shore till he sees the light twice.”

“I ’ll come with him,” said Walter excitedly. “I can sit in a boat.”

“No, you need n’t,” said Dan. “I may want a boat-load o’ the best men in the village. Tell ’em the redskins have come.”

“That ’s so,” said Walter, as he shook Dan’s hand hard and then limped away in the direction of the bridge. “The redskins have come, and Plum Hollow ’s got to fight!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEWS IN PLUM HOLLOW.



THE afternoon session of the Plum Hollow school began as usual, and yet it did not. The horn sounded at the door, and every scholar, large and small, promptly obeyed the horn. Perhaps some of them may have imagined that there was more toot in it than they were accustomed to hear; but they were not indoors long before they also discovered that they had more schoolmaster.

Not that Mr. Prindle had actually increased in height or weight since the morning. He was always disposed to stand up pretty straight, too, especially in the schoolroom, and he was a very commanding man; but that afternoon he gave himself up to the keeping of order and to what he called "discipline."

More than once he spoke of the "perfect discipline maintained in all military organizations," and little

Johnny Humphrey was disciplined sharply for replying:

“Pop says Injins hev got to be fit from behind a tree. He shot one that way, und I ’m goin’ to grow up und shoot some myself.”

After Johnny’s bad luck was over, things were going along fairly well. There was the most peaceful kind of buzz all over the room, and Mr. Prindle was standing collectedly and firmly in the middle of the room, looking around him with a long ruler in his hand, when there came a loud gun report just under one of the front windows.

“Oh! Ah!” remarked Mr. Prindle, stepping off at once toward his desk, at the other end of the room. “I ’m glad I brought it. I must see if it ’s loaded. Children, school is dismissed. Your parents will wish you to be at home. Did I? How did I forget to load that gun?”

Bang! went another loud report, and little Johnny Humphrey squealed:

“I guess that ’s the Injins!”

A voice out under the window was remarking unexcitedly:

“There! I ’d picked at that pan and touch-hole all day, and I ’d no idee it ’d go off. Guess yours ’ll work too, Jim.”

“Course it will now,” replied Jim, “but that load had been in for more ’n two months. Wonder it did n’t bust. Now we kin clean ’em out without takin’ ’em to Squire Warner’s.”

“He ’s got enough to do,” was the reply. But the released children were pouring out of the school-house, and Mr. Prindle stood pallidly gazing at the weapon he had pulled out from behind his desk, remarking:

“What ’s become of that flint? Gone? Then there is nothing left for me to do but to surrender at discretion. No man can contend with the Six Nations without any flint in his gun.”

He was perfectly correct, beyond a doubt, and there was no flint in him or about him when he slowly, dignifiedly strode to the door and peered out.

“There are none in sight,” he whispered. “I—I’d better go to the fort at once.”

Excepting for the peculiar nature of its fence, the great enclosure containing the mills and storehouses

of Plum Hollow looked like anything but a fort that day. It seemed to be a busy kind of market-place, into which wagons were coming to deposit their varied contents in one or another of the several buildings. The grist-mill and the saw-mill were running their best, with full water-power and with ample materials to work upon of grain or logs.

If the gathering of men near the door of the grist-mill were anything in the nature of a "town meeting" it was a very quiet one. No speeches were making, nor was there a sign of excitement at the moment of the schoolmaster's solemn march through the open gate. He had learned, no doubt, that the shots which had so suddenly dismissed his school had not been fired by or at the dreaded "aborigines," and he was all himself again, with a good color but with something still the matter with his eyes. They were like those of a scout or a hunter in the woods, for they were continually searching hither and thither as if expecting to find something.

Nobody paid him any particular attention as he strode manfully forward, but when he reached the edges of the group at the mill and asked a neighbor

for the latest news concerning "possible depredations," he was told, half dejectedly:

"News? Why, there ain't none. I wish I was back hum a-gettin' in my pumpkins. Do n't see what I come for."

"But what about the demands of the Iroquois chiefs?" enquired Mr. Prindle. "How are we to conciliate them? Has n't Squire Warner been here?"

"He 's jest come," replied another voice. "Hullo, Squire! Got any news?"

"Nothing but that," replied the gunsmith quietly, holding out the arrow which had been fired at York, and briefly explaining that matter.

"Dog killin' 's a bad sign," was declared by man after man, but nobody seemed in the least excited about it. One remarked at last:

"Guess the dogs had better be kep' in; but, Squire, did n't Dan say that that there redskin was a Tusky-roarer?"

"Why, Squire," exclaimed Mr. Prindle, in astonishment, "you have n't said a word about the demands of the red men for supplies of arms and ammunition, or for the return of escaped prisoners!"

“What ’s that, Squire?” asked two or three at once, and they all said they had heard something about it; but the gunsmith replied to them, rather than to Prindle:

“Why, you know how that is. Redskin bluster! Vagabond! They have n’t any idea we ’ll arm ’em. Might as well ask us to send ’em our scalps.”

“But about the surrender of Daniel van Lennep?” persisted the schoolmaster. “In times of public peril it is needful often that one should be sacrificed for the good of the many—of the community as a whole. For my own part, I am ready——”

“Hurrah!” shouted the deep voice of Jacob Dunbar from the edge of the gathering. “That ’s Prindle! Ready to go instead of Dan! I move we take the offer. They ’d be glad to settle it that way.”

The roar of good-humored chaff that followed told all that was needful for the nerves of the Plum Hollow men. Not one of them had dreamed of treating the demand for Dan as anything more than the “bluster” it was called by the Squire, but nobody had seen any fun in it until now, and all Mr. Prin-

dle's attempts at explanation were met by more hearty thanks and praises for his courage and self-devotion. They even discovered the condition of his gun, and told him he had knocked the flint out so as not to irritate the redskins.

During much of that time, however, a very eager-looking young fellow, lame of one leg, had been limping along through the woods and across the bridge until he reached the gate of the Warner place and shouted.

Whether he was heard or not, no answer came quickly enough, and he limped on through the yard toward the shop side-door. He glanced toward the barns as he went, and York was there, under his apple-tree. He did but rise and stretch himself and yawn kindly enough, for a moment, as a dog who recognized a friend and saw no necessity for throwing away good barks. Then, however, he began to sniff, sniff, more and more fiercely, as if something had come that excited him. The shop door was shut, and Walter was just trying it when a voice behind him exclaimed:

“Oh dear! What is it? How did you get hurt?”

“Polly,” he replied, turning quickly, “where ’s the Squire? Where ’s Jake?”

“Mr. Warner went to the village,” she said, “and Jake followed him. Said he did n’t care to chop corn when——”

“Walter! Are you hurt? What is it? Where are they? How came you to carry a tomahawk?” came in almost faltering tones from the house door.

“Why, Mrs. Warner,” faintly responded Walter, “there was another buckshot in my side, and I did n’t know it. ’T is n’t anything much, I guess, but it bleeds. I was only thinking of my leg.”

“O Walter!” she sobbed. “Come in! Are they near us? Was anybody killed?”

“No, Mrs. Warner, I can’t come in. I must get to the village, for I want to see the Squire and Jake right away. Dan killed one redskin and I killed another. He ’s a-scouting along the lake. I told him he ’d be tomahawked.”

“The brave fellow!” she said. “Oh, I ’m afraid he will! You come into the house. Polly can get there twice as quick as you can. Go, Polly! I ’ll attend to Walter.”

"I guess it is best," he said. "Polly, tell Jake I want him, and nobody else, if we 're to save Dan."

Polly was singing hysterically, but she darted into the kitchen, caught up an old straw hat of Jake's, put it on, and was off toward the village at a rate which could not reasonably have been expected of her.

"Take your coat off, Walter," said Mrs. Warner, as she led him into the loom-room, but she helped him do so, and she used a pair of scissors for a moment over the wound, before she exclaimed:

"There! How glad I am! I've seen shot wounds before now. It went right along between two bones and went out. It'll cure right away, but I wonder you could have walked so far."

All the while he was telling her about his scouting and the skirmish, and how startled he was by the unexpected crack of Dan's rifle.

"Dan tied up my leg, and he says it won't trouble me much. Oh, but won't the Squire be tickled when he hears what a rifle that is! I do n't know just how far Dan was when he shot that redskin."

"The brave fellow!" she said again. "To think of giving him up!"

They were not the only interested people who were talking about Dan. Over in the forest a group of war-painted figures stood around a couple of motionless, prostrate forms and exchanged many an "Ugh" and many a brief guttural remark; but another had joined them who was not painted, and to whom, at first, they seemed to pay small deference. He went over the ground as they had done, inch by inch, until at last he called the chief, as if by name, and pointed at an all but invisible mark on the ground. He spoke in an Indian dialect, but what he said might have been interpreted:

"See Little Foot? Boy prisoner of the Onondagas. Got away. Lives in Plum Hollow. Sharpshooter. Kho-go-na-ga great chief. Saw him. Know him. All settlers wake up. Build fort!"

Instantly Kho-go-na-ga became a man of importance, because of his great knowledge of things in Plum Hollow and especially concerning Dan. He felt free to tell all he knew, at least, and while he told it Ung-gah-wish sat meekly under a tree, at a respectful distance. She, too, had spied and scouted in and around Plum Hollow, but none of

the glory of the occasion could descend upon a mere squaw.

There was more grief than glory, after all, for here were two prime Cayuga warriors, one of them a chief of some note, wiped out in a wayside skirmish by a brace of pale-faces, one of whom was no brave at all, but a mere boy.

No doubt Dan had as good a pair of feet as any other boy of his age, but Kho-go-na-ga's account of his tracks around the buck and the imprint he had left behind him now had earned for him a name among the red men, and they spoke of him as Little Foot, even when they added other syllables which told that he was also "Run Away."

If the Tuscarora spy had noted the small footmark more carefully than had the others, it seemed that nothing else could have escaped them. They even drew conclusions from the shape and size of the bullet wound by which Dan's mark had fallen, and the chief sagely remarked of it, "Heap big rifle!"

There was nobody to tell him at how great a distance that shot had been fired, or how much that

kind of weapon would have to do with the future of the entire red race, tribe after tribe.

After all, no great length of time was spent in this Indian "council of war," and then, without a whoop or a yell, the entire party began to scout carefully forward along the faint trail left by Walter and Dan.

They did not advance far, moreover, before Walter's limp was discovered, and they knew, or argued, that one of their pale-face enemies had been wounded. Even with that small comfort they did not care to go ahead too rapidly, for they could not guess at what moment they might run against another squad of Plum Hollow marksmen.

It was just at the moment when Prindle was trying to explain the loss of the flint from the lock of his gun that two very unexpected additions were made to the town meeting, if not to the garrison of Plum Hollow Fort. The great gate was wide open and unguarded, and they came hurrying through.

"Lyra!" exclaimed Polly, panting hard. "I'm all out o' breath. You'll hev to tell 'em how it is. So glad I met you! Tell 'em what Walter said."

Lyra was flushed enough, but her eyes were bright with courage, and her step was as if she were ready for a race. Prindle had dismissed school just in time for her to meet Polly on the road and to come back with her and bring the news. She passed right through the outer edge of the crowd of men and said, so loudly that all could hear her:

“Father, the Indians are in the woods! Dan killed one, with the new rifle. Walter killed another, and he’s wounded. He’s at our house and wants to see Jake.”

“Where’s Dan?” asked Squire Warner.

“Scouting in the woods,” replied Lyra. “Walter can tell the rest.”

“He’s about the best man we’ve got,” shouted one of the neighbors. “Ain’t I glad Prindle’s goin’ back to the Onondagers instid o’ him. Best kind o’ trade for Plum Holler.”

Polly had partly recovered her breath, but she had hardly a chance to speak, for she was all but drowned with questions. Prindle tried again to make himself heard, but it was of no manner of use. Even the arrival of real danger did not seem to drive the fun

out of some of the Plum Hollow men, and they continued to thank him kindly.

Jake had not said a word. Hardly was his name mentioned before he slipped out of the crowd to where a saddled horse was hitched, and in another moment he was galloping up the road. Whose horse it might be was of small consequence at such a time.

Mrs. Warner was in the kitchen, busy around the fire, with an idea that a fellow hurt as badly as Walter ought to be fed immediately, when Jake strode in, asking:

“Where ’s Walt?”

“Front room,” she said. “He ’ll get well right away. I ’m afraid we ’ll never see Dan again.”

“I ’m going after him,” said Jake.

Walter heard through the open doors, and shouted: “Come here, Jake. I ’ll tell you how.”

Jake went and listened, and thought for a moment before he remarked:

“Reg’lar Injin! I ’ll be there. Glad you ’re only barked a little. Walt, that ’s only a scoutin’-party, but it means that a bigger swarm is comin’. This

'ere settlement 's got to wake up. What on earth 's the matter with that dog? I 'll go and see."

Out he went, for York was howling loudly and plunging against his collar and rope, as if he knew of something serious.

"I 'll loose him," muttered Jake. "I want to see where he 'll p'int to."

The instant York was free that question was answered, for he bounded toward the house.

"What can the critter mean?" said Jake, as he hurried after the excited animal.

Into the house and through it dashed the mastiff-bloodhound, smelling as he went, until, sitting before the fire in the front room, he discovered the wounded man. One sniff more, and York too sat down. Up went his head, and long, mournful, terrible was the burst of baying which announced his discovery of freshly shed blood, for the subtle instinct of his race had led him correctly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIGNAL FIRE ON THE SHORE.



F an Indian heard that rifle crack," said Dan to himself, just after he parted from Walter, "he 'd scout straight for it. Of course he would. All I can find along here 'll be sign of 'em, if there are any more of 'em. I 've got to find it before dark, too."

The shadows were indeed deepening in the woods, although it was still broad daylight among open fields and in the village. There was none the less need for caution, perhaps, and Dan worked his way forward slowly, until between vistas of the trees he could now and then catch glimpses of the placid face of Silver Lake.

"I must n't waste any time," he said. "Jake 'll be there. Have n't seen a thing yet. That red-skin? Yes, I remember now. Seems to me I 'd forgotten how it was, somehow. We were all

abed and asleep. Father, he had preached twice that Sunday, and he was tired. Mother 'd been out among the sick people, and she was tired. They came just before morning. Nobody 'd any thought of their coming away in there. I heard 'em first. They caught me as I ran out. I always wondered what they took me prisoner for. Why did n't they kill me?"

It was a question which seemed to puzzle him greatly, and he said no more during several minutes of careful lurking along from cover to cover.

The look upon his face grew strangely sad, and even sickly. It was the gray look that Mrs. Warner had spoken of to Polly. Then his lips parted and his eyes dilated, as if he were seeing something.

"Aunt Mary?" he said. "I believe they tomahawked her in the doorway. Tom was killed by the British at Saratoga, but Reuben was home, and he fought 'em. He fought hard too, and so did some of the men from the other houses, but it was too late. Father? Mother? They did n't come out of the house. Sister Sarah? I never can remember about her, but know what was

done to the rest of them, at the Seneca village. I almost think, sometimes, that I saw it and heard it. I can't tell for certain. Reuben was n't there, but Deacon Salter was, and his wife, and the rest. That is—no, there was n't so many of 'em. They did n't bring along any children. Sometimes they do n't. I saw the houses burn. Hullo! They 've been here!"

Memories, whatever they may have been, seemed to flash away from him, and as he stooped to examine something on the ground the expression of his face changed. He was all eagerness and energy, as if a discovery had roused him to all the keenness there was in him. He seemed to read as if a book had been opened at a page he had seen before.

"Canoe mark," he muttered. "The edge of it came down on that moss and they rolled it over. They did n't take it away, either. I know what they are up to. There!"

Light as was the canoe, it had not been launched and paddled through the flags without breaking or bending enough of them to leave a kind of wake

for a short time at least, and Dan evidently knew something about canoes and portages.

“That ’s where it went,” he said, “and then they swam ashore and came out of the water right here. I ’ll know where to find it—somewhere in the cove, and I ’ve looked into that when Jake and I have been out fishing. Pretty safely hidden, too, if I did n’t know where to look for it. It ’s getting dusk fast now. I must push right along.”

On he went, more cautiously than ever, although he expressed a firm opinion that all the danger was now behind him, unless he should find more somewhere in the neighborhood of the dam.

“The lake ’s pretty narrow there,” he said, “but they ’re more likely to be away down stream, around the lower bridge. Wish I knew if word to come in had been sent to Bill Roberts. His clearing is too far out. He ought not to stay on this side at all just now.”

Over in the village there appeared to be an impression that, after all, there was no immediate danger to anybody, but all the tongues and ears were busy with the remarkable adventure of Dan

and Walter. Jake had ridden back at once with the particulars, and to hunt up some men he knew—"the right kind of fellers," as he said, "to go a night fishin' aout on the lake. Mebbe we won't ketch nothin', and mebbe we will."

As for Polly and Lyra, there was no use in their trying to set out for home right away, with so many women insisting upon knowing precisely how the two Indians were killed, and where, and how they looked afterward.

Mr. Prindle had something like a rest at last, and he was even able to express a fear that "there will be a terribly revengeful feeling excited among the Indian tribes by the unexpected slaughter of their warriors. In my opinion, they will be exceedingly exasperated."

There he paused and looked around, as if to make sure nobody had heard him, and at the same time to gather his somewhat injured dignity for a march homeward. He also desired company, for it was no time, and he said so, for any of the Plum Hollow settlers to travel the roads alone.

It was a time, however, when they were able to show how wonderfully people who lived near the border could become hardened and even reckless. Mrs. Warner, indeed, after attending to Walter as if she had been his mother, left York sitting by him and walked out to the gate. Her first glance was sent toward the village, but there was nobody in sight in that direction, and she turned and looked up the road toward the bridge over Skenauga Creek. Not that she could have expected Dan or anybody else at that hour, but she remarked aloud:

“What if they were coming? They could come right across. There’s nobody to stop them. Half the people of the settlement could be murdered before they could get to the fort. We might be. Here we are, if they should come. It’s been just so, again and again, in ever so many places. Oh, why does n’t General Washington try and do something!”

Neither she, nor anybody else, nobody but himself, knew what were the demands upon the hero leader of the New Republic in that hour of its

darkest trial, but she was putting in words a cry which was sent to him from all the long border which he could not guard.

She stood and looked now at the great forest itself, beyond the creek, as if it fascinated her. It was so strangely gloomy at that hour, and in it were hidden such dark deeds and such terribly grisly dangers. These might take shape and come out at almost any moment, but her next thought was:

“Dan? He is only a boy, but he is in there somewhere, watching for them. He is n’t like any other boy. Lyra, I wish you were in England, rather than on this horrible frontier!”

Mothers might well feel so in those days, when they looked at their children and called to mind Wyoming and scores of other stories of the doings of the red men.

At that very hour, away over in the heart of the Iroquois country and in front of their Great Council House, as the darkness came on, fires which had burned nearly all day were heaped higher, and there were preparations for the even-

ing part of the grand entertainment which had called together so many hundreds of the children of the forest.

Among them all, warriors or squaws, there was not one by whom the work or pleasure or war vengeance in which they were engaging was looked upon as anything else than a righteous act, for the doing of which they had been educated from the cradle. They knew no wrong and felt no pity while inflicting the last extremity of human torment.

Polly and Lyra escaped from their friends in the village at last, and turned their steps homeward. Hardly had they done so before it seemed as if they had been waited and watched for, so quickly were they joined by the schoolmaster, but his first remark was:

“We must wait a little. Jacob Dunbar had better go with us. Our house is in a somewhat exposed and isolated position. I do not know what has become of Squire Warner.”

“Oh no,” said Lyra. “We won’t wait. Father won’t come for a good while. They are talking about the bridge.”

“That bridge!” exclaimed Mr. Prindle. “It should be demolished immediately. It furnishes transportation for the forces of the enemy.”

“Humph!” replied Polly. “Jake says the redskins won’t care a button. They can cross the creek, bridge or no bridge. I ’m goin’ hum.”

“So am I,” said Lyra. “Oh, how I want to see mother and poor Walter Hawley!”

Mr. Prindle gazed down the village street, and his eyes rested for a moment somewhat longingly upon the bristling palisades and frowning log block-house of Plum Hollow Fort.

Why could not that institution be induced to get up and come along and stand around him and keep off wild aborigines all the way to the gunsmith’s?

He deeply felt the fact that he wore no palisades, that he was not a block-house, and that his gun had no flint in its lock. What was more, it was growing darker every moment, and the idea of solitude was itself pretty dusky. Polly and Lyra were already several paces away, when he seemed to catch his breath, as if he had just gotten his

head above water, and then he went after them with long, courageous paces, remarking:

“We ought to have a guard of men with us, but we will get there as quickly as we can. I still hope that something may be done to conciliate the irritation of the Iroquois.”

All that had thus far been done was very much as if the settlement had sent out a very lively pair of bumble-bees to meet the first squad of red men upon its arrival.

Polly was not thinking of the Indians altogether, for her next remark was:

“They ’ll all come to meetin’ to-morrow, anyhow. Seems to me I never wanted to see them all so much in my life.”

That evidently expressed her loving interest in her neighbors, near and far, and Lyra said:

“Yes, so do I, and next Wednesday is to be the donation at Elder Barclay’s, and they ’ll all be there——”

Mr. Prindle had caught up, and he interrupted her at that point with:

“H’m! Decidedly! But the proper place for

public assemblies at this juncture is the fort. I shall advocate that idea."

"You could n't move the schoolhouse into the fort, nor the meetin'-house, nor the minister's house," said Polly, "and I do n't know how they 'll feel about leavin' any of their folks at hum."

"I guess they won't," exclaimed Lyra. "I hope they 'll bring all the children, too."

It could not have been truly said that Plum Hollow settlement was not excited by the news of the skirmish, but nobody acted or seemed to feel as might have been expected of them by other people, living in other kinds of places. Man after man expressed his satisfaction over the results of the little fight, and his admiration for Dan and Walter. Hardly one failed, moreover, to tell of some affair in which he or his neighbors had been engaged. Among them were quite a number, too, who had been "out" as soldiers against the red men or the British, and there were elderly men who had served in what they called "the old French war." As for patriotism, the tone of the community

might have been gathered from an assertion freely made by little Johnny Humphrey, that:

“Pop, he says he ’s glad ther ain’t any Tories in the Holler. ’Cause if there was we ’d hev ter hang ’em, und ropes is scurse.”

That had a savage sound, perhaps, to ears that were not accustomed to hear of Tory and Indian doings, but the very women and children of the frontier had thoughts and feelings which might have helped them understand the merciless nature of the wild red people. There was something very “Indian” in the way almost everybody spoke about the enemies who were threatening them. No one in Plum Hollow knew that such scenes as they were thinking of were going on at that very hour, nor how red and horrible a light was thrown out into the gloom by the fires in front of the Great Council House in the Onondaga Valley. The evening part of that illustration of savage ways in warfare had begun, however, and the one white man among the throng of spectators was remarking, in a tone of angry discontent:

“The Major had no right to go away, or to say

what he did. The chiefs are insulted. They're pretty nigh ready to send after him, and if they do he and his squad 'll never reach the Genesee."

The humane British officer, therefore, had made his vigorous effort to save the lives of the captive settlers at the peril of losing his own, for the haughty sachems of the Iroquois considered themselves the allies, but by no means the subjects, of the King of England.

Again and again, as he scouted slowly forward through the woods on the western shore of Silver Lake, words fell from the lips of Dan van Lennep that almost seemed to tell of something he had seen, somewhere, very much like what the agent was now looking at and scolding Major Shelton for opposing. Dan could mention names, too, but he said:

"Somehow I can't remember it all. Anyhow, I'm getting down toward the lower end of the lake. I can't be more 'n a quarter of a mile above the dam. Hullo! What's that? No, it is n't any Indian. I'd better keep still a bit. Something——"

There he paused, for a strange kind of sound was drawing nearer. He heard the tread of feet, that walked and stopped and walked again, and he heard, too, a hard, husky breathing, now and then changing into a suppressed groan. Dan listened closely, and he did not retreat but rather went forward.

“Bill!” he said. “Bill Roberts!”

“Here I am,” said Bill.

“I’m Dan van Lennep,” said the young scout, in a low, sharp whisper. “Are the redskins after you?”

“No, I guess not. I do n’t care if they are,” replied Bill. “I kinder want to die, but I want to kill some more on ’em first. I only got one, sure. Mebbe another. I was in the corn patch when they struck the house.”

“The folks?” asked Dan.

“All gone!” groaned Bill. “Wife, children, baby. They burned everything.”

“How many redskins?” asked Dan.

“I only saw half a dozen. What I want is to warn the village. How ’ll we get there?”

“They ’re warned,” said Dan. “Come just a little farther—right down to the shore now.”

“Do n’t say any word about my place, Dan,” said Bill. “Do n’t ask nothin’.”

Dan was silent, but they were under a vast maple, on the very margin of the lake, and he was groping around on the earth.

“I found some birch-bark as I came along,” he said, “but the moss was damp. There, this ’ll do.”

He seemed to have made quite a heap of bark and twigs between the roots of the tree, and now there was a clicking of flint and steel, in the slow, old process of kindling a fire before matches were made.

First a spark caught with a little flash among some very dry gray moss between Dan’s knees, and he held it up to blow upon it gently. A dull glow grew and widened, and he carefully thrust the handful in among the bark and twigs, blowing and adding more of his dryest fuel.

“Ef you make any blaze, the redskins ’ll see it most likely,” said Bill. “We sha’n’t git across the lake this way.”

The little blaze that now had begun faced the lake. It was a very small blaze, and Dan could cover it in the hollow of a slab of bark. He could cover and uncover it, sending flashes out over the water and then hiding them.

“I guess he ’s a-signallin’,” thought Bill Roberts; but at no great distance along the shore a shadow that stood among several other shadows drew back suddenly into the forest darkness with a fierce, surprised “Ugh!”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOBLIN IN THE SHOP.



HERE is n't really anything much the matter with me," remarked Walter Hawley to himself, as he sat in front of the fire and poked it with the long iron-shod hickory stake that served as a poker. "I would n't like to have Lyra think I cared too much for being hurt a little. If there's anything a girl despises it's a coward. Oh, but do n't I wish I knew what had become of Dan!"

Down in the village Squire Warner seemed to be again replying to suggestions concerning the bridge over the Skenauga above his place, for he said to a little group at the gate of the fort:

"Take it up? Why, what good 'd that do? Redskins do n't need any bridge. We do, though. Dan may need it to come home by. I've something on my mind about that bridge, too, but I want to hear from Dan first. I can't feel easy 'bout him, nohow. But then, he can scout like a young Indian."

All seemed to take an especial interest in the absent hero, for Lyra asked excitedly after him on reaching the house, before she went into the front room to see Walter. It almost looked, too, as if York came to meet her enquiringly, with a whine that said:

“I ’ve looked for him everywhere. Do you know where he is?”

“I wish you were with him,” she said, and then she added: “No, I do n’t. You might bark at the wrong time. He ’s better off alone.”

“Indeed he is,” shouted Walter from the other room. “He did n’t even want any men along, unless there was enough of ’em for a big fight. He ’s a-scoutin’.”

“O Walter,” responded Lyra, “do you feel better now?” And he had no reason to be dissatisfied with what either she or Polly said to him or about him, for they seemed to have an idea that he was dreadfully wounded and would have been justified in groaning, if he wanted to groan.

On the contrary, however, he appeared exceedingly cheerful, even happy, as if buckshot were,

done to the rest of them, at the Seneca village. I almost think, sometimes, that I saw it and heard it. I can't tell for certain. Reuben was n't there, but Deacon Salter was, and his wife, and the rest. That is—no, there was n't so many of 'em. They did n't bring along any children. Sometimes they do n't. I saw the houses burn. Hullo! They 've been here!"

Memories, whatever they may have been, seemed to flash away from him, and as he stooped to examine something on the ground the expression of his face changed. He was all eagerness and energy, as if a discovery had roused him to all the keenness there was in him. He seemed to read as if a book had been opened at a page he had seen before.

"Canoe mark," he muttered. "The edge of it came down on that moss and they rolled it over. They did n't take it away, either. I know what they are up to. There!"

Light as was the canoe, it had not been launched and paddled through the flags without breaking or bending enough of them to leave a kind of wake

for a short time at least, and Dan evidently knew something about canoes and portages.

“That ’s where it went,” he said, “and then they swam ashore and came out of the water right here. I ’ll know where to find it—somewhere in the cove, and I ’ve looked into that when Jake and I have been out fishing. Pretty safely hidden, too, if I did n’t know where to look for it. It ’s getting dusk fast now. I must push right along.”

On he went, more cautiously than ever, although he expressed a firm opinion that all the danger was now behind him, unless he should find more somewhere in the neighborhood of the dam.

“The lake ’s pretty narrow there,” he said, “but they ’re more likely to be away down stream, around the lower bridge. Wish I knew if word to come in had been sent to Bill Roberts. His clearing is too far out. He ought not to stay on this side at all just now.”

Over in the village there appeared to be an impression that, after all, there was no immediate danger to anybody, but all the tongues and ears were busy with the remarkable adventure of Dan

and Walter. Jake had ridden back at once with the particulars, and to hunt up some men he knew—"the right kind of fellers," as he said, "to go a night fishin' aout on the lake. Mebbe we won't ketch nothin', and mebbe we will."

As for Polly and Lyra, there was no use in their trying to set out for home right away, with so many women insisting upon knowing precisely how the two Indians were killed, and where, and how they looked afterward.

Mr. Prindle had something like a rest at last, and he was even able to express a fear that "there will be a terribly revengeful feeling excited among the Indian tribes by the unexpected slaughter of their warriors. In my opinion, they will be exceedingly exasperated."

There he paused and looked around, as if to make sure nobody had heard him, and at the same time to gather his somewhat injured dignity for a march homeward. He also desired company, for it was no time, and he said so, for any of the Plum Hollow settlers to travel the roads alone.

It was a time, however, when they were able to show how wonderfully people who lived near the border could become hardened and even reckless. Mrs. Warner, indeed, after attending to Walter as if she had been his mother, left York sitting by him and walked out to the gate. Her first glance was sent toward the village, but there was nobody in sight in that direction, and she turned and looked up the road toward the bridge over Skenauga Creek. Not that she could have expected Dan or any body else at that hour, but she remarked aloud:

“What if they were coming? They could come right across. There’s nobody to stop them. Half the people of the settlement could be murdered before they could get to the fort. We might be. Here we are, if they should come. It’s been just so, again and again, in ever so many places. Oh, why does n’t General Washington try and do something!”

Neither she, nor anybody else, nobody but himself, knew what were the demands upon the hero leader of the New Republic in that hour of its

darkest trial, but she was putting in words a cry which was sent to him from all the long border which he could not guard.

She stood and looked now at the great forest itself, beyond the creek, as if it fascinated her. It was so strangely gloomy at that hour, and in it were hidden such dark deeds and such terribly grisly dangers. These might take shape and come out at almost any moment, but her next thought was:

“Dan? He is only a boy, but he is in there somewhere, watching for them. He is n’t like any other boy. Lyra, I wish you were in England, rather than on this horrible frontier!”

Mothers might well feel so in those days, when they looked at their children and called to mind Wyoming and scores of other stories of the doings of the red men.

At that very hour, away over in the heart of the Iroquois country and in front of their Great Council House, as the darkness came on, fires which had burned nearly all day were heaped higher, and there were preparations for the even-

ing part of the grand entertainment which had called together so many hundreds of the children of the forest.

Among them all, warriors or squaws, there was not one by whom the work or pleasure or war vengeance in which they were engaging was looked upon as anything else than a righteous act, for the doing of which they had been educated from the cradle. They knew no wrong and felt no pity while inflicting the last extremity of human torment.

Polly and Lyra escaped from their friends in the village at last, and turned their steps homeward. Hardly had they done so before it seemed as if they had been waited and watched for, so quickly were they joined by the schoolmaster, but his first remark was:

“We must wait a little. Jacob Dunbar had better go with us. Our house is in a somewhat exposed and isolated position. I do not know what has become of Squire Warner.”

“Oh no,” said Lyra. “We won’t wait. Father won’t come for a good while. They are talking about the bridge.”

“That bridge!” exclaimed Mr. Prindle. “It should be demolished immediately. It furnishes transportation for the forces of the enemy.”

“Humph!” replied Polly. “Jake says the redskins won’t care a button. They can cross the creek, bridge or no bridge. I ’m goin’ hum.”

“So am I,” said Lyra. “Oh, how I want to see mother and poor Walter Hawley!”

Mr. Prindle gazed down the village street, and his eyes rested for a moment somewhat longingly upon the bristling palisades and frowning log block-house of Plum Hollow Fort.

Why could not that institution be induced to get up and come along and stand around him and keep off wild aborigines all the way to the gunsmith’s?

He deeply felt the fact that he wore no palisades, that he was not a block-house, and that his gun had no flint in its lock. What was more, it was growing darker every moment, and the idea of solitude was itself pretty dusky. Polly and Lyra were already several paces away, when he seemed to catch his breath, as if he had just gotten his

head above water, and then he went after them with long, courageous paces, remarking:

“We ought to have a guard of men with us, but we will get there as quickly as we can. I still hope that something may be done to conciliate the irritation of the Iroquois.”

All that had thus far been done was very much as if the settlement had sent out a very lively pair of bumble-bees to meet the first squad of red men upon its arrival.

Polly was not thinking of the Indians altogether, for her next remark was:

“They ’ll all come to meetin’ to-morrow, anyhow. Seems to me I never wanted to see them all so much in my life.”

That evidently expressed her loving interest in her neighbors, near and far, and Lyra said:

“Yes, so do I, and next Wednesday is to be the donation at Elder Barclay’s, and they ’ll all be there——”

Mr. Prindle had caught up, and he interrupted her at that point with:

“H’m! Decidedly! But the proper place for

public assemblies at this juncture is the fort. I shall advocate that idea."

"You could n't move the schoolhouse into the fort, nor the meetin'-house, nor the minister's house," said Polly, "and I do n't know how they 'll feel about leavin' any of their folks at hum."

"I guess they won't," exclaimed Lyra. "I hope they 'll bring all the children, too."

It could not have been truly said that Plum Hollow settlement was not excited by the news of the skirmish, but nobody acted or seemed to feel as might have been expected of them by other people, living in other kinds of places. Man after man expressed his satisfaction over the results of the little fight, and his admiration for Dan and Walter. Hardly one failed, moreover, to tell of some affair in which he or his neighbors had been engaged. Among them were quite a number, too, who had been "out" as soldiers against the red men or the British, and there were elderly men who had served in what they called "the old French war." As for patriotism, the tone of the community

might have been gathered from an assertion freely made by little Johnny Humphrey, that:

“Pop, he says he ’s glad ther ain’t any Tories in the Holler. ’Cause if there was we ’d hev ter hang ’em, und ropes is scurse.”

That had a savage sound, perhaps, to ears that were not accustomed to hear of Tory and Indian doings, but the very women and children of the frontier had thoughts and feelings which might have helped them understand the merciless nature of the wild red people. There was something very “Indian” in the way almost everybody spoke about the enemies who were threatening them. No one in Plum Hollow knew that such scenes as they were thinking of were going on at that very hour, nor how red and horrible a light was thrown out into the gloom by the fires in front of the Great Council House in the Onondaga Valley. The evening part of that illustration of savage ways in warfare had begun, however, and the one white man among the throng of spectators was remarking, in a tone of angry discontent:

“The Major had no right to go away, or to say

what he did. The chiefs are insulted. They 're pretty nigh ready to send after him, and if they do he and his squad 'll never reach the Genesee."

The humane British officer, therefore, had made his vigorous effort to save the lives of the captive settlers at the peril of losing his own, for the haughty sachems of the Iroquois considered themselves the allies, but by no means the subjects, of the King of England.

Again and again, as he scouted slowly forward through the woods on the western shore of Silver Lake, words fell from the lips of Dan van Lennep that almost seemed to tell of something he had seen, somewhere, very much like what the agent was now looking at and scolding Major Shelton for opposing. Dan could mention names, too, but he said :

"Somehow I can't remember it all. Anyhow, I 'm getting down toward the lower end of the lake. I can't be more 'n a quarter of a mile above the dam. Hullo! What 's that? No, it is n't any Indian. I 'd better keep still a bit. Something——"

There he paused, for a strange kind of sound was drawing nearer. He heard the tread of feet, that walked and stopped and walked again, and he heard, too, a hard, husky breathing, now and then changing into a suppressed groan. Dan listened closely, and he did not retreat but rather went forward.

“Bill!” he said. “Bill Roberts!”

“Here I am,” said Bill.

“I ’m Dan van Lennep,” said the young scout, in a low, sharp whisper. “Are the redskins after you?”

“No, I guess not. I do n’t care if they are,” replied Bill. “I kinder want to die, but I want to kill some more on ’em first. I only got one, sure. Mebbe another. I was in the corn patch when they struck the house.”

“The folks?” asked Dan.

“All gone!” groaned Bill. “Wife, children, baby. They burned everything.”

“How many redskins?” asked Dan.

“I only saw half a dozen. What I want is to warn the village. How ’ll we get there?”

“They ’re warned,” said Dan. “Come just a little farther—right down to the shore now.”

“Do n’t say any word about my place, Dan,” said Bill. “Do n’t ask nothin’.”

Dan was silent, but they were under a vast maple, on the very margin of the lake, and he was groping around on the earth.

“I found some birch-bark as I came along,” he said, “but the moss was damp. There, this ’ll do.”

He seemed to have made quite a heap of bark and twigs between the roots of the tree, and now there was a clicking of flint and steel, in the slow, old process of kindling a fire before matches were made.

First a spark caught with a little flash among some very dry gray moss between Dan’s knees, and he held it up to blow upon it gently. A dull glow grew and widened, and he carefully thrust the handful in among the bark and twigs, blowing and adding more of his dryest fuel.

“Ef you make any blaze, the redskins ’ll see it most likely,” said Bill. “We sha’n’t git across the lake this way.”

The little blaze that now had begun faced the lake. It was a very small blaze, and Dan could cover it in the hollow of a slab of bark. He could cover and uncover it, sending flashes out over the water and then hiding them.

“I guess he ’s a-signallin’,” thought Bill Roberts; but at no great distance along the shore a shadow that stood among several other shadows drew back suddenly into the forest darkness with a fierce, surprised “Ugh!”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOBLIN IN THE SHOP.



HERE is n't really anything much the matter with me," remarked Walter Hawley to himself, as he sat in front of the fire and poked it with the long iron-shod hickory stake that served as a poker. "I would n't like to have Lyra think I cared too much for being hurt a little. If there 's anything a girl despises it's a coward. Oh, but do n't I wish I knew what had become of Dan!"

Down in the village Squire Warner seemed to be again replying to suggestions concerning the bridge over the Skenauga above his place, for he said to a little group at the gate of the fort:

"Take it up? Why, what good 'd that do? Redskins do n't need any bridge. We do, though. Dan may need it to come home by. I 've something on my mind about that bridge, too, but I want to hear from Dan first. I can't feel easy 'bout him, nohow. But then, he can scout like a young Indian."

All seemed to take an especial interest in the absent hero, for Lyra asked excitedly after him on reaching the house, before she went into the front room to see Walter. It almost looked, too, as if York came to meet her enquiringly, with a whine that said:

“I ’ve looked for him everywhere. Do you know where he is?”

“I wish you were with him,” she said, and then she added: “No, I do n’t. You might bark at the wrong time. He ’s better off alone.”

“Indeed he is,” shouted Walter from the other room. “He did n’t even want any men along, unless there was enough of ’em for a big fight. He ’s a-scoutin’.”

“O Walter,” responded Lyra, “do you feel better now?” And he had no reason to be dissatisfied with what either she or Polly said to him or about him, for they seemed to have an idea that he was dreadfully wounded and would have been justified in groaning, if he wanted to groan.

On the contrary, however, he appeared exceedingly cheerful, even happy, as if buckshot were,

“Now, Jake,” said Dan at last, “we must run in here. I marked the place as well as I could. We must get that canoe.”

“Or they ’ll bring a dozen more,” said Jake; “and the lake ’d be their best road to the village, or the fort either. They could paddle around any night, and find aout jest what we were doin’.”

Dan was silent, for the broad nose of the scow-built punt they were in was already pressing down the tall rushes. Any moment might tell whether or not there were more canoes than one, or if a war-party of savages were there to protect the Iroquois navy. Not even Mr. Prindle, stooping to look under a bed, had half so much to test the firmness of his nerves, for a volley of arrows poured into that crowded boat would have been a serious matter.

Slowly, silently, holding their breaths, with two men paddling while the others sat ready to shoot, the boat glided on.

Bump! It was a very gentle shock.

“Hush!” whispered Dan. “Yes, it ’s empty.”

“Hurrah!” burst from one of the men. “If we have n’t got it!”

He did not raise his voice, even then, above a very low key, but instantly there came from the black shore beyond a strangely mingled response.

The wail of an infant sounded first, and then a pair of girlish voices screamed, "Mother! Mother!" and a boy shouted eagerly, "White men!" but above them all arose a kind of agonized joy that cried out aloud:

"Saved! Oh, thank God! My children! Oh, if He could have saved my husband too!"

"Mattie! Mattie!" hoarsely responded Bill Roberts. "I 'm here. I reckon I laid out two on 'em. Keep still, or they 'll know where ye are."

"O-oh!" she groaned, but there were men in the canoe now, as well as in the boat, and both came rushing to the shore.

"In with ye, Mrs. Roberts," said Jake, "you and the young ones, into the scow. Quick! you can't tell how nigh they may be."

"Mattie," exclaimed Bill, getting his head out from a curious smothering of wife and baby, "how did you get away from 'em?"

“Why, Bill,” she said, “we did n’t have to get away. We were over on the rise, this way, after those butternuts. The children wanted me to come with ’em, and I fetched the baby along. We saw the redskins rush in, and we heard your gun—and—and I thought you were gone—Bill!”

“One o’ them went,” he growled, “and I do guess I got another. But what did ye do then?”

“Why, Bill,” she said, “there was n’t but one thing to do. We struck through the woods, to get to Warner’s bridge and cross to the Holler. We crep’ on as kerful as if we were Indians, too, and it came dark, and we ’d only got to this very place. So we lay down under the bushes, and Charlie sat up to watch.”

“And we lost all our butternuts,” added the smallest girl, “and they set the house afire——”

“And I guess they took the cows, too,” mourned the larger girl, but Charlie added, valorously:

“I was glad I had a gun, too, but I did n’t get a chance to shoot.”

“Quick, now,” commanded Jake, and off he pushed the boat, followed closely by the canoe.

Out they went through the yielding flags and over the rippling surface of the lake, while above them a great rift in the flying clouds let down a sudden starlight, and Mattie Roberts whispered:

“Bill, we are all here.”

There were two boat-loads of people, who seemed to be almost rollicking after that, for Jake Dunbar set the thing going by shouting:

“Now, boys, three cheers for Mattie and the baby. We ’ll all turn in and put up a new house for ’em soon ’s the redskins are cleaned out. Now!”

They cheered well. So very well that they startled a heavy-looking clump of bushes on the western shore and made it break out into an astonished “Ugh!”

They were even heard, faintly, at the fort toward which they were steering, and more than one voice exclaimed:

“Hear ’em? They ’ve got Dan.”

So they had, and when they pulled in at the wood-pile and came out of the boats into the glare of the bonfire on the “parade” there was more cheering, for a crowd of Plum Hollow folk had

gathered to wait for Dan, and a great deal more rescue than they expected had actually come.

Then there were sombre faces while the story of the Roberts family was told, but Mattie and her children were led away in triumph.

"Squire," said one of the neighbors, "they 're gettin' in pretty nigh. We was n't waked up any too soon."

"I do n't know that we 're quite waked up yet," replied the gunsmith. "Anyhow, Dan and I are going home. I 've an idea in my head."

"You 'most always hev," said his friend, "but I 'd ruther hev a smooth-bore than a rifle, any day."

"They 're good to hold a fort with," said the gunsmith, but he did not say which kind he referred to. He and Dan and Jake had not gone far along their homeward path, talking over the evening's work, before he added:

"Dan, that 's your gun. I 'm going to make me another like it."

Dan was trying to express his thanks, and was not doing it very well, when the Squire added: "Well, not exactly like it. I think I can make

a barrel that will throw farther, and maybe it'll shoot closer. I can't tell till I've tried it on. Anyhow, you've fairly earned your rifle."

"He'll hev to use it, too," remarked Jake, "and I'm glad he can plumb centre. Every Injin caounts one."

"Woof!" came joyfully out of the darkness ahead of them, and in a moment more York was almost devouring Dan.

Polly had carelessly let him out of the house, but Jake was justified in asking:

"Now, Squire, he's your dog, not Dan's. Haow on arth do you s'pouse he got it into his head that we were worried about Dan?"

"Woo-oof!" said the dog himself, as he turned and bounded away toward the house.

"It beats me," was Squire Warner's own reply. "He heard 'em talking, and they spoke Dan's name pretty often."

"He can all but talk, he can," said Jake. "There's no tellin' if he can't make out the talk of other folks, that do n't know half what he knows."

Perhaps York was regretting, only a few minutes later, that even those he loved most could not quite understand the language he spoke in. They did, too, in part, for when he barked and whined and pawed at the door Lyra came and let him in. But when he barked so cheerfully inside, and danced all around the rooms, and even put his paws on the ladder and barked up at whomever might be there, everybody was dull and stupid.

“What can he mean?” exclaimed Mrs. Warner.

“He cuts around half as if he was goin’ out of his head,” remarked Polly, after he had all but upset her.

“York? York?” enquired Lyra, patting him affectionately. “What is it?”

“Woof-woo-oof!” shouted York.

“I know what it is,” sang out Walter from the front room. “It ’s Dan. He and Dan are great friends.”

“There!” exclaimed Lyra, through an excited burst of happy barking. “He began as soon as he heard Dan’s name. I guess he has seen him.”

York’s head was at the crack of the side door

now, and he was listening keenly, with every now and then a vigorous tail-wagging and an expectant whine.

“Woof!” he shouted, jumping at the latch, but now all of them could hear the voices that were coming through the gate, and particularly that of Jake as the door swung open:

“Hurrah! Mrs. Warner, here’s Dan. Tell Walt. He had to swim the lake, though. He’s been shootin’ redskins all day.”

Could it be possible that even Jake Dunbar was getting excited? Nobody that knew him had ever thought anything of that kind possible of him.

“Dan! Dan!” called out Mrs. Warner. “Do come right in. Do n’t wait.”

“Dan,” shouted Polly, “there’s some supper a-waitin’. I do jest want to see ye the wust in the world.”

So she did, and she kissed him, too, the moment she had a chance, while Lyra looked him all over and said:

“O Dan! Why, you have n’t been wounded at all!”

The expression of her face seemed to indicate that she had expected to find shot-holes in him, but his reply was almost laughing:

“No, Lyra, they did n’t hit me. But the best of it all is the escape of Bill Roberts’s wife and children.”

“Oh, how was it?” exclaimed Mrs. Warner, and there the story-telling began.

“Oh, do n’t I wish I’d been there!” came from Walter regretfully, more than once, especially after the story got to the boats.

So interested were they all that even York sat down, with his head on Dan’s knee, and listened so attentively that he paid no attention to cautious stirrings around in the loom-room. At the first racket of Dan’s arrival there had been movements, more or less military or strategic, in the upper part of the house. The garrison was still in full dress, and it seized its gun promptly. Then it moved steadily out of its own room, through Jake’s, to the head of the ladder, and took a survey of the field of operations below.

“He has again escaped the Iroquois,” he ex-

claimed. "There has been another skirmish, and they will be yet further exasperated. I fear there will be no room for conciliatory measures."

Then he lay at full length, with his head in a good position for listening, but so many things escaped him that he determined to proceed, and he went down the ladder. Not until he reached the bottom did he remember, as he should have done, but he then exclaimed:

"I have left my gun!"

It staggered him for a moment, but he reconsidered the matter and added:

"It will be there when I return."

In a moment more he stood in the door of the front room and was greeted heartily by Jake with:

"Hullo, Prindle, haow 's your aowl? We needed him to-night. We jest did want somethin' that could see in the dark. The redskins are comin'."

"I think," said Mr. Prindle, "that it would now be of little avail to surrender young Van Lennep. He might be sent away, though, and we could tell them he is n't here. Are—are there many of them?"

“Swarms of ’em,” replied Jacob. “The woods are full of ’em. We ’re settin’ sentries to-night, and your post ’ll be at the bridge. We want a good man there. Jest the spot for an aowl, too.”

“I ’m not in the militia,” replied Prindle, pretty firmly. “Schoolmasters are exempt. I ’m part of the garrison.”

“That ’s so,” said Jake. “I forgot that. But we ’re goin’ to post part of the garrison on the west side o’ the lake. That ’s your place. You ’ll have a chance before anybody else will.”

“Do stop, Jacob,” said Mrs. Warner. “I want to hear the rest about Mattie Roberts and the baby.”

Prindle was entirely willing to be again only a listener, but Squire Warner quietly slipped out of the house and went to the shop. He had a lantern with him, and he also took along one of the many ideas which, according to his neighbors, were such a worry to him.

He saw the blunderbuss on the anvil the moment he entered the shop, but it did not alarm him. On the contrary, he at once walked forward and took it by the back of the neck as if he meant to throt-

tle it. Instead of doing so, however, he poured in much gunpowder from a horn in his hand, followed that with a big wad, added buckshot and slugs in a liberal manner, and remarked:

“I do n’t care if it busts you, but I ’ve made you come as nigh to being a cannon as your size ’ll warrant.”

He primed the flint-lock of the antiquated weapon with care, and then he gathered up the outlandish rigging noticed by Mr. Prindle and walked out of the shop. He did not again pause until he stood upon the bridge over the Skenauga.

“How they ’d laugh,” he said, “if they knew what I ’m doing; but there is n’t a white man, or a cow, on the other side of the creek. It ’s safe to set it.”


Down sat the blunderbuss in the middle of the bridge, and around it the gunsmith geared his rigging. One strong cord crossed the bridge at the height of about a foot at the farther side, and it led around wooden pins in the logs, back and around other pins at the middle. Then there was not light enough—for he had covered his lantern

—to see just how the cord went around a central pin and ended at the trigger.

“If it was n’t for their work at Roberts’s house,” remarked the Squire, “I would n’t do it. I won’t say a word about it to Jake or any of ’em.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE SENTRY ON THE BRIDGE.

OUNTRY people generally go to bed early, and all the Plum Hollow settlement, village and farmhouses, was very still at the hour when Mr. Prindle again climbed his ladder, closely followed by Dan and Jake. There was no more talking to be done there, for the story of the day had been told.

Even the copper-colored country people in their villages were quiet, and the very fires in front of the Onondaga Council House were at last smouldering low. Within it the privileged warriors on duty guarded the ever-burning sacred fire of the Onondagas.

There had been a grand, a terrible evening, but it was over. It was over for all the captives whose fate had so stirred the heart of the humane and brave British major. He, too, was now resting in a

forest bivouac, many a long mile away, with a sentry posted near him and an Indian guide keeping watch with the sentry.

Throughout that region, in cabin and in wigwam, red fathers and mothers had gathered their children for the night, in a full assurance that their frontier was thoroughly well protected. No enemy could touch them. The little ones would grow up securely, and in due season they would inherit the hunting-grounds and the corn-fields, with the lakes and streams so rich with fish, and the warriors would be as brave as were their fathers, and the kings of the pale-faces would come, as in former time, to offer presents and to beg for the powerful alliance of the unconquerable Iroquois, the lords of the forest.

The night waned slowly—slower for some people than for others. It must have gone slowly for York, for he lay before the side door with his head on his paws, and every now and then a quiver of an ear and a low whine expressed his dissatisfaction at being shut in.

The owl, in his cage in the barn, felt so badly

that he tried to hoot and could not. He broke down upon the first notes, and they sounded too much like the cooing of a wood pigeon to suit a fellow who was really fond of fresh pigeon.

Down at the fort the sentry at the lake-side wood-pile went to sleep twice, and awoke each time with a dim idea that he had been aroused by the sound of paddling, as of Indians in a canoe; but it was only the wash of waves on the margin near him.

Mr. Prindle slept well at last, but only after getting up and arranging his faithful gun with its honest-looking muzzle on the other pillow. Then they both went to sleep.

Walter Hawley was having a tip-top night of it now Dan was safe, but it was odd that Dan himself should sleep so soundly after so exciting a day. Once only he awoke, but it was just after he had talked in his sleep.

“That rifle ’ll carry more ’n a mile,” he had said.

Dreams are apt to take root in memories, especially if there has been unusual mental disturbance.

Perhaps the most watchful of all who sat up that night was the old brass blunderbuss, sitting motion-

less in the middle of the bridge. He was firmly fettered, and all he could do was to sit and look steadily toward the forest and wait for daylight, and for somebody to come and untie him. He showed no signs of restlessness, but rather a kind of brazen indifference to even the flight of time. There were very few noises to attract his attention. The low ripple of the Skenauga under the bridge could hardly be called a noise, nor the several-times repeated plunges of pickerel, but in the darkness before the dawn there were distinct disturbances of the dull silence. The first were made by the loud "honk" of teams of southward-flying wild geese away up in the sky, where, no doubt, it was already lighter than on the earth. After that followed two or three low cries which might have been the caw of crows, if any in the woods were up so early. Or they may have been signals of some kind, for they seemed to answer one another and draw nearer.

The shadows of giant sycamores near by deepened the night upon the bridge itself, and the blunderbuss cowered low upon the flat, split-log level where

he had been fettered. He could not possibly have seen a group of misty forms that came swiftly, though cautiously, along the road, as if in haste to get across the creek. They may have had an errand in the village, or on the hill beyond, or among the scattered farmhouses up or down the road. Just one brief second they halted in the edge of the woods, but not a dog was barking and the coast seemed clear. Therefore the too-early crows called again to any brethren of theirs who were lost and were trying to find their way. The shadowy forms moved forward, but at that moment a very loud, hoarse "honk" was heard in the sky, and as the first hasty foot strode from the earth road to the wooden bridge-path the startled blunderbuss gave a sudden spring, going off with a stunning report and throwing a complete somersault backward.

A wild, fierce yell responded. Whoop followed whoop, for a few seconds only, and then there were shadows that lifted and carried off other shadows, but no other foot was set upon the bridge.

There lay the blunderbuss, after hurling at the

intruders every pellet of the lead with which Squire Warner had choked him to his muzzle, but the gunsmith's odd idea had worked.

The Warner homestead was at some distance from the bridge. All the people in it had been up unusually late that Saturday evening, and they slept the sleep of the weary. Perhaps their cows and horses and pigs would have had to wait longer than ordinarily for their Sunday breakfast if they had been entirely dependent upon human awaking, but they were not so.

The noise made by the brass sentinel at the bridge barely succeeded in reaching the house, but it was replied to with energetic promptness. York was on his feet instantly, his very hair rising as he poured forth a long, enquiring bay, and then he plunged against the door. A startled hoot in the barn was followed by loud crowing and cackling in the hen-yard, and by a beginning of calls for the waiter at the pigs' hotel near by. Even Nannie got up from her straw and looked around her, and the horses pawed in the stable.

Whether or not any of the human ears would

otherwise have caught the sound from the bridge, the entire garrison now awoke at once.

“Indians!” exclaimed Mr. Prindle. “I ’m glad I slept on my arms. I ’m ready for duty.”

In a moment more he had closed the door of his room and was kneeling in a corner, with the muzzle of his gun pointed threateningly through a shot-hole.

“Have they come?” anxiously asked Mrs. Warner, as her husband hurriedly made ready to go down, unable to conceal the excitement he was in.

“I need n’t call to any of them,” he responded, “they ’ll all jump. I want to see what that thing ’s done.”

“Dan,” said Walter, a moment later, “it ’s too bad! I can’t use my leg. ’T is n’t hurt much, either. I can use a gun through a hole, though.”

“Something ’s up,” said Dan. “We ’ll know in a minute. There is n’t any whooping yet.”

“Prindle,” shouted Jake, “they ’ve got here. You come on with me. Guess it ’s only one tribe.”

“My gun commands the back yard,” responded Prindle bravely. “I have the advantage of position.”

Jake was really too much in earnest and in haste to chaff the schoolmaster, but Dan and York were the first to rush out, and neither of them knew exactly what to do.

“No use to scout close by,” said Dan to himself. “If they were nigh the house York ’d know it. I’ll wait for the Squire.”

It was but a minute before the gunsmith and then Jake were with him, and the former started at once for the gate.

“We’ll scout along slow,” he said, “but I guess they’re not on this side o’ the creek.”

The darkness on the cleared ground was already yielding a little, but not much could be seen as yet. In the house there was lighting of candles and stirring up of fires. No more racket arose at the barns, and York was now marching forward in silence, like a prudent and thoughtful dog with an enemy somewhere before him.

Slowly, cautiously, in the gray of the increasing dawn, the little squad worked their way up the road, waiting all the while for any signal from York, but it did not come until he reached the bridge.

Then he sat down, without putting a foot upon it, and lifted his head and howled.

“That ’s it,” said Dan. “They ’ve been there and they ’ve gone.”

“That ’s what he means,” replied the Squire. “They might be within long range, too.”

“Guess not,” said Dan. “York’s gone across the bridge. There!”

York had paused on the other side, and there he howled again, but no response of shot or whoop came from the dense gloom of the forest. No enemy was near enough to give any. Hurrying away through the woods, as fast as the darkness and the burdens they were bearing would let them, a party of furiously angry and disappointed red men were retreating from a village which they had expected to find asleep, but which had proved to be terribly and cunningly watchful. Their stealthiest approaches had been baffled, and they had seemed to fall into trap after trap.

Nothing could have been more discouraging to warriors who depended so much upon treacheries and surprises. Besides, as Jake had remarked,

“every redskin counts.” Even the victories won by the Iroquois in recent years had made sad gaps among them, and this present foray was beginning to look like a defeat—that is, like something which called loudly for a prompt and sweeping revenge.

“It went off,” remarked Squire Warner, as he stooped and examined the blunderbuss. “I declare! It did n’t bust, and I can set it again.”

“Wal,” exclaimed Jake, “if that there jimcrack does n’t beat me! Haow on arth did it work?”

“First rate,” replied Dan, as he closely examined some spots on the ground at the other end of the bridge. “But there were braves enough to carry off any that were hit.”

“Do you reckon any were killed?” asked Jake, coming forward.

“Perhaps,” said Dan, “but that blood shows for pretty bad hurts.”

“Used up, anyhow,” said Jake, “and that ’s jest as good for us.”

“This village is safe for to-day,” was the verdict of the gunsmith. “But ain’t I glad I set that spring-gun! Let ’s go back to the house.”

Even York was willing, although he had a deal of puzzled whining to do as he went, and he every now and then turned for an anxious sniff toward the bridge.

There had been something almost weird in the appearance of the house during all that time. Walter had dragged himself to a shot-hole in the front room and was watching through it with his gun lying by him.

Every window and every door but the side door was heavily barred. That was wide open, and in it stood Lyra and her mother, armed with two of the spare guns, listening, listening for any sounds of combat, and ready to let in those whom they expected to see at any moment hurrying back for shelter.

“O mother!” whispered Lyra. “What if they should not get back? They might—— And Indians might come instead. Father—— How can Polly sing so?”

Mrs. Warner was silent, but she raised her gun and cocked it, and so did Lyra.

Polly must have been waiting, too, and yet in

front of the rapidly blazing kitchen fire she worked at her every-morning task. She must have remembered that it was Sunday, for she sang nothing but hymns, and when she heard the cheerful bark with which York announced the safe arrival at the gate of himself and the men under his care, she broke triumphantly into the long-metre doxology, and then she broke down, and so did Mrs. Warner and Lyra.

The Squire was the first to say anything that really seemed to fit, for the women were under a strong impression that there had been a deadly ambushade of some kind, and a narrow escape from tomahawks.

“Hannah,” he said to his wife, “we can all go to meeting to-day. Not a redskin ’ll cross that bridge.”

“Nor the lake either,” added Jake. “I guess they ’re abaout as puzzled a lot o’ wolves as was ever in them woods.”

He was pretty nearly correct, except that he could not have known much about the wolf history of that forest. Neither did he know what problems were at that very time exercising the minds of the warriors and sachems of the mighty Iroquois.

There had been reasons of state for the assembling of so many Onondagas, and with them so many representatives of the other tribes, around the "sacred brand" of the Six Nations. There had been a season of policy in the terrible entertainment provided on Saturday, for the war fever was known to be burning a little low, in consequence of the losses the tribes had sustained in several campaigns. Their blood required stirring for further forays upon the white man's frontier, and the advocates of active war had made their beginning thoughtfully.

At the earliest light, therefore, there were signs of what might be called a business day beginning in and around the scattered lodges and the small hamlets of the Onondaga Valley. The smoke arose early, and before long there were warriors passing from lodge to lodge, or gathered in groups, for sombre consultations.

It was very nearly so in Plum Hollow, although the village itself pretty plainly declared that Sunday had come, and both the saw-mill and the grist-mill were keeping it conscientiously.

CHAPTER XVI.

HERE AND THERE.



HERE were no costly buildings in Plum Hollow, but there was a vast deal of picturesque and peaceful beauty that bright Sunday morning of October. It was all so sunny and so prosperous and so absolutely quiet. Even the smoke from the scattered chimneys went up with an air of saying, "This is n't work; we would n't do any work to-day, not on any account."

Perhaps the whole settlement did not contain a quieter household than that into which Mr. Prindle looked down after hearing the remarks of the Squire and the rest, or some of them, concerning the doings at the bridge.

"The skirmish is over," he remarked, "and the aborigines have retreated. This house and its garrison are not immediately threatened. I can leave my post of duty and go down to breakfast. That

woman Sackett has a remarkably fine and clear voice. She sings well."

She did, and her heart was in it that morning, but the rest of the house was so still partly because it was nearly empty.

York and Lyra were at the gate, looking up and down the road for a moment. Mrs. Warner was at her milking. Her husband had gone over to the shop to see if all was right there. Dan was in the front room fixing Walter's bandages, and Jake was at the barns. He had chores to do, as usual, but he was just then at the door of the old log barn, looking in.

"No need o' coopin' up that aowl," he remarked. "He kin hev the hull barn for a cage. The hens are all aout. He 'll be a healthier aowl with more room to hoot in."

So said, so done, and the lath-and-wicker coop was opened, but Mr. Prindle's prize did not express any gratitude. He only sat still and blinked, and in a low, discontented voice he asked of Jacob, "Who? Who?"

"Sorry you can't go to meetin' with the rest of

us," replied Jacob, "but I don't s'pouse you 'd agree with aour preacher, nohow. You kin sit and think. Or you might sing."

So saying, he shut the door and went about his business, doing all things just as usual. In fact, Mr. Prindle himself was allowed to do the greater part of the talking for the household, at the breakfast-table and afterward. He did it liberally and well, moreover, up to the very moment when he strode away toward the village, armed, at the head of a little column which contained all but Dan. Of him Mr. Prindle remarked:

"They will probably now not press their claim for his restitution. I agree, however, that it is best for him to remain and garrison the house in our absence."

"And your aowl kin hold the barn," said Jake. "There! If I did n't forget to lend him your gun!"

His own was over his shoulder, nevertheless, and so, from all the houses in the valley, that day, the men who went to meeting went prepared for other tidings than those of peace. They were justified in

prudence by what had been done at the Roberts place, and now the first news they heard on reaching the house of worship was the report of the early morning skirmish between the blunderbuss and the "unknown" at Warner's bridge.

There were many women and children in the gathering at the Plum Hollow meeting-house, but there were none in an equally large assembly at the Great Council House of the Iroquois. Squaws and boys and girls were out of place in a council of warriors. Still, a stranger might have noticed, as a sign of peace and safety, that the greater number of the stately braves who stalked about, or who sat upon the beaten earth and stared at the council fire, carried no visible weapons. Whatever might be sticking in their belts, indeed, was generally hidden by the best robe or blanket in the possession of the wearer, for they had all put on their "Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes."

It was a sombre, thoughtful gathering, to the last degree dignified and ceremonious, but it was not long in settling itself for the business which had called it together. No white man was present, for

even the British agent was not of sufficiently high rank, personally, to entitle him to a share in the deliberations of men who considered themselves the princes of the forest.

There seemed to be no chairman of the meeting, nor secretary, nor reporters, but the order of business must have been understood, for all waited in silence until a tall, broad-shouldered warrior, with striking features and very striking ornaments, arose to speak.

He was evidently a practised orator, and his address seemed full of fiery energy, but it fell upon ears that were dull, or that were waiting for somebody else. Not but what there were grunts of approval, but there were also gloomy faces and headshakings of doubt and dissent.

If there had been an interpreter present he could have reported that the orator strongly depicted the power of their allies, the British, and placed in a vivid light the duty of vengeance upon the settlers who had rebelled against their king. His last words were:

“Ga-ne-a-go-a-no” (the Mohawks, the People of

the Flint Rock) "are ready to strike Yonondio. What do my brothers say?"

Only for a moment stood up a grizzled chief, who held out a pointing hand and said in a bitter tone:

"Brothers, we know that the O-na-yote-ka-o-no" (the Oneidas, the People of the Granite Rock) "are not with us. Only a few of their braves are on the war-path. They will stay at home, like women. I speak for the Nun-da-wa-o-no" (the Senecas, the People of the High Hill). "We are with Ta-yen-da-na-ga. We will strike!"

There was again a waiting, and many eyes were turned toward a simply dressed warrior of middle height but of powerful frame, who shook his head and looked angrily into the fire. As if called upon, another chief arose and said:

"Gen-u-gweh-o-no" (the Cayugas, the People of the Marsh Country) "will go with their brothers. We wait."

So arose another, and spoke for Dus-ga-o-weh (the Tuscaroras, the Shirt-wearing People), and then the orator so evidently expected stepped forward and looked around him. He said:

“I am Oun-di-a-ga. I speak for O-nun-dah-ga-o-no” (the Onondagas, the People on the Hills). “Our hearts are with Ta-yen-da-na-ga, and our young men are already on the war-path. We have struck Yonondio many times. We will strike again. All Ho-de-no-san-nee-ga” (the Iroquois country, the Land of the People of the Long House) “will be lost to us if we do not strike while we can. We have struck them on the Ga-wa-no-wa-na” (Susquehanna) “and we must strike them on the Te-an-ton-ta-to-ga” (Mohawk). “Then they will leave the Long House in peace. If we do not strike, Ha-no-da-ga-ne-ans” (Washington, the Town Destroyer) “will be too strong for us. We have lost many warriors. We must have the help of our pale-face brothers, who will come with Ta-yen-da-na-ga.”

He spoke with art and power. He told them of their narrowing borders. He mentioned the fate of other tribes—of the Delawares; of the “little bush peoples,” Manahattoes, and the like; of “the fishing peoples,” Pequots, Narragansetts, Wampanoags; of the waning power of the Hurons of the Woods; of the steady encroachments of the settlers, and the

severe blows they had already inflicted upon the mighty Six Nations. It was time for the People of the Long House to strike for their very existence, for revenge, and for glory.

Unmistakable applause greeted the eloquence of the head chief of the Onondagas, and when Oun-di-a-ga sat down the plans of Brant and Johnson for a vigorous raid into the Mohawk River settlements and elsewhere had been carried forward, so far as the tribes could carry them in council. The region indicated was to be dealt with even as Wyoming had been, and the colonial frontier was to be driven back to Ska-na-ta-de-o (the Hudson).

It was worthy of note that not one of the speakers suggested a doubt of the justice of their cause. The very losses they had sustained in battles were so many additional counts in their long indictment of the intruding frontiersmen. They were, to their own minds, patriots defending their inherited country, fighting for their homes, their families, their very lives, and with no resource left them but the utter destruction of the enemy, or of all enemies within striking distance.

The council was long, but when it ended Ta-yen-da-na-ga and Oun-di-a-ga were sure that their recruits would join them rapidly. There was no need for time-consuming preparation. The chiefs and warriors who were to go upon that war-path would need to do little more than pick up their weapons.

The smaller parties already at the front were to be speedily supported by a force which could be fairly estimated as containing nearly a third of the fighting strength of the Iroquois. To this were to be added both Tories and Canadians, so that a very dark cloud indeed was gathering to burst upon the long and almost unguarded line of the American settlements.

The Sunday morning council in the Onondaga Valley was in a kind of race contrast with what was really a Sunday morning council of war held in Plum Hollow, both before and after the services in the meeting-house, in front of which the settlers stacked their guns on going in for prayer and praise and preaching.

There was one feature common to the consultations in both places. The allied chiefs agreed with Oun-di-a-ga that something must be done, or their

very Council House itself, and all the villages around it, would before long be wiped away.

The good people of Plum Hollow were of one opinion, that something must be done, or their meeting-house and village might any night be burned up.

Both councils were right in their view of the situation, and both decided upon the worst thing they could have done. The red men decided to make it needful for Washington to earn more perfectly his Indian name. The Plum Hollow people talked the matter over and went home to wait for word from other settlements as to what it was best to do.

Some of the homes had been left to take care of themselves during all those hours of worship and council. The farms on the east and south of the village, indeed, were hardly considered as belonging to the frontier. Any Indian attack, it appeared to the minds of the people, must come from the westward. The village and the fort would be assailed first, and homesteads over the hill were therefore almost as safe as if they had been the homes of Oun-di-a-ga's warriors.

The somewhat startling events which had closed the week, however, had increased a general impression that the Warner place was a kind of outwork, holding the most exposed position. It was very much as if Mr. Prindle's military views were correct, and any incursion of the Iroquois would surely be made by way of Warner's bridge, where the heroic aborigines could cross the Skenauga without wetting their feet.

If it was the post of danger, it was not without a garrison that day, for York was there, and he had Dan and Walter to back him if needful. Outwardly all was as peaceful as if the orchards had been Oundi-a-ga's own, and that patriotic chieftain could indeed have shown the gunsmith some pretty good trees, apple and peach and plum. In his garden, too, there had been raised that season an abundance of potatoes, corn, beans, cucumbers, pumpkins, squashes, watermelons, and the like. One notable difference there had been, nevertheless, in the management of the two farms, for the Squire had tilled the earth whenever he was able to escape from his forge and his work-bench, but an Indian warrior

considered himself a gentleman, and only the squaws of the Oun-di-a-ga family had soiled their hands with hoeing.

The women of the Warner family were all at church. Walter was asleep, and so was York, but Dan sat in the loom-room, with the big Dutch Bible in his lap. He had been turning its leaves in quite a number of places, and at last he said, as if arguing a difficult question :

“I can read it, tip-top. Glad I can, too. I guess the Canaanites must have been a kind of Iroquois, but I ’ve counted up more ’n six nations. That would let in the Delawares and the Hurons. There used to be Indians beyond the Hudson, too, just as there were tribes t’ other side o’ Jordan, and they cleaned ’em all out and settled the country. That ’s what we ’re doing—if they don’t come and clean us out. They will, too, if we don’t watch, but I ’ll do just as it says, and I won’t be revengeful. I guess I never am, except when I remember back, and it is n’t often I can do that. It comes sometimes, though.”

He put the book away, for York had gone to the

gate to meet the rest of the family, and Dan knew by his bark that they were all there.

They came home in pretty good spirits, too, but the first words of Mrs. Warner on entering the house were:

“Dan, soon ’s you ’ve had your dinner I ’ll have a big bundle o’ things for you to take to Mrs. Roberts. She ’s at the Humphrey place. I ’ve a whole lot of baby things put away.”

“Dan,” exclaimed Lyra, “you just ought to have been there and seen the boys.”

“What were they up to?” asked Dan.

“Up to?” she said. “Why, every boy that could get a gun had brought one, but the fellows that could n’t find guns brought something else. One of ’em had a butcher-knife and one had a hatchet. I guess they all had knives, even if they hid them.”

“That ’s so,” said the Squire, laughing. “They were ready for a fight, but I ’m glad they ’ll have the fort to run to.”

There was gossip enough to repeat and talk over, but Jake had gone at once to the barns, and had all but dragged the schoolmaster with him.

“You must n’t neglect your aowl,” he said; “and besides, I want you to inspect the barns.”

“They would be a primitive object of assault, in case the dwelling should be besieged by the Iroquois,” replied Mr. Prindle, “but they could not be defended.”

“Oh yes, they could,” said Jacob. “You will see, just as I do——” At that moment he threw open the door of the log barn, and he at once exclaimed: “Hullo! that aowl!”

The bird was perched upon a peg in a log, high up in the gloomiest corner, but Jacob stepped forward and examined something scattered over the floor.

“Feathers!” he said. “That ’s abaout all. One o’ that there late brood o’ spring chickens. I did n’t know I ’d left one o’ them in the barn. No, Mr. Prindle, he does n’t need anything more to eat just naow, but you ’d better see ’t he has a good drink. Do n’t you see how it is? He ’s a Mohawk.”

“He only obeyed the instincts of his nature,” responded the schoolmaster.

“Who? Hoo?” said the owl, but Jake remarked, with apparent enthusiasm:

“Just like any other Indian. Never mind him, Prindle. If you and he are besieged you must have provisions. But this is the place for you. Reg’lar fort. Plenty o’ shot-holes. You can bring your bed aout here.”

“Never!” sternly replied the schoolmaster. “This outpost must be abandoned, and the full strength of the garrison must be concentrated upon the defence of the main building and its precious contents.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HORSE-THIEF.



HUS far the Iroquois had maintained their ancient boundary lines untouched, but, as their orators had declared, there was a general sense that the frontiers of the Long House were tightening. The Senecas, the “Keepers of the Western Gate,” at Ne-ah-ga Te-car-ne-o-di, where the Great Water poured over the rock from Do-sho-wah, or Lake Erie, were made aware of it by the frequent visits of the great canoes of their British and Canadian allies. Moreover, the claims of the Six Nations to their hunting-grounds westward and in the Ohio country were now disputed sharply by other red men, especially by dangerous tribes immigrating from the south.

The Mohawks, the “Keepers of the Eastern Gate,” found themselves all the while confronted by the ploughed lands of freshly arrived settlers, for in

spite of the long war the American colonies were growing.

They agreed with Ta-yen-da-na-ga, their great chief, and with his white brothers of the Johnson family, speaking for the king beyond the salt water, that Yonondio must be checked or the Long House would be in danger of destruction.

The Onondagas, the "Keepers of the Council Brand and the Wampum," were ready for war rather than peace, at any time, but there was an intense and genuine feeling of patriotism in the warlike fervor which animated the gathering warriors.

A swift messenger set out at once for the fortress-like Johnson mansion, in the forests of the north, to hasten the coming of the Canadian allies. Other messengers ran in various directions. Warning was sent to the outlying war-parties that all might work together. Every day would be of importance, for the chiefs were well aware that no large force of theirs could assemble without being speedily reported to their enemies. It must move at once upon getting together, and its blow must be struck suddenly. There were some Senecas already in the

field, but more were coming and might be expected by the time the runner could return from the Johnson place. Every warrior was determined to do his duty to his country, except such recreant Oneidas as were convinced that the Granite Rock would be safer if they preserved the friendship of their near-by pale-faced neighbors rather than that of distant allies.

Dan did his errand to the Humphrey farm and to Mrs. Roberts and her little ones shortly after dinner, and every man and woman he met, not to speak of boys, heard the story of the victory won at the bridge by the blunderbuss. Somehow or other, it seemed another feather in Dan's cap that he had such stirring news to tell. Everybody was disposed to agree with him that that party of Indians was not likely to come back right away. They and others like them would surely wait for a better opportunity. At all events, he went and came, and the Sunday evening waned away, and through all the night that followed even York himself gave not one sign of uneasiness.

Monday morning did not come altogether peacefully, however. When the Plum Hollow settlers

awoke and looked out, the face of nature had changed, and a driving storm of cold rain was sweeping down the valley from the over-full weather chambers of the north.

“It ’ll be the dullest kind of day,” said Lyra, and so said everybody else.

The war excitement itself would have to die away, for there were plenty of wise heads in Plum Hollow with enough knowledge of Indian ways to agree with Dan when he looked out and said:

“See that? They won’t stir to-day.”

“They do n’t mind a rain,” said Lyra, a little as if Dan were robbing people of the right to be scared and solemn.

“Well, no,” replied Dan. “They ’re tougher ’n we are. But sometimes they do n’t seem to be.”

“Won’t they do anything in wet weather?” asked Walter, wincing, as he tried to bear his weight on his shot-scored leg.

“They ’ll fish a little,” said Dan. “The fish ’ll bite on rainy days. But they want good weather for a war-path. No matter how cold it is, you know, but it ’s got to be middling dry.”

“That ’s so,” added Jake, who had been out at the barns. “I never heard of their trying on anything great if there was a storm comin’.”

“Jake,” exclaimed Mrs. Warner, “you ’re a real good fellow to do all the milking for Polly and me.”

“I ’ll milk Nannie,” said Lyra.

“No, you need n’t,” responded Jacob, with a fine flush of pleasure on his face. “She ’s done. But Prindle ’d better go aout and ’tend to his aowl. The critter asked after him kindly, and I told him he was pretty well, considerin’.”

“I ’m ever so much obliged——” began Lyra gratefully, but he interrupted her with:

“Not at all. But Nan ’s disturbed in her mind. She came pretty nigh kicking the pail over.”

“I do n’t blame her one bit,” said Mrs. Warner. “She ’s like all the rest of us. We ’d better get to work and not think so much about the Indians. I ’m glad the storm has come, and we know they won’t.”

“They ’ll git awful wet if they do,” remarked Jacob. “It ’s a reg’lar buster.”

“Jacob,” asked the schoolmaster at that moment, as he landed at the bottom of the ladder, “have you discovered any indications of the enemy?”

“Wall, no, not many,” replied Jake. “There are tracks ’raound the barn and in the yard. There may be some on ’em hidin’ behind the fence along the road as you go to the village. You kin take your gun along. You may git a few.”

“There will be no school to-day,” sternly responded the schoolmaster. “Nobody will expect it.”

“No,” said Jacob. “They would n’t so much mind the Injins, but then sech a drivin’ storm as this ’ere. I would n’t go to school myself. You kin stay at home and hev a singin’-school. Bring your aowl right in, and Polly Sackett, she ’ll jine, if her throat is n’t tired——”

“You shet up, Jake Dunbar,” shouted Polly from the kitchen, “or you won’t git any breakfast. It ’s ready for the rest on ’em.”

So were they all ready, but before he went out the schoolmaster paused at the fireplace and stooped and looked long and earnestly up the chimney.

No wild aborigine was there, but he drew back

with a sudden "Oh!" as a mass of soot came darkly down and hit him full in his face.

"War-paint, I declare!" shouted Jacob, as Mr. Prindle hurried past him toward the sink and the wash-basin. "Prindle's gettin' ready for a war-path. Tell you what, Prindle, if you do n't hev any luck along the fence, try the woods behind the barn. You might bring in a string o' skelps before noon."

"Jake," exclaimed Mrs. Warner, "do stop your nonsense. This is n't the time for it. They did come, and they are sure to come again."

"That 's been about so," said her husband, "ever since the country was settled."

"We ought to have some protection," she replied. "It ought not to be so."

"There 's only one protection for an American frontier," said the Squire soberly, "and that is about ten miles deep of farms just outside of it. All the tribes of the red men could n't break through a ten-mile fence of ploughed ground and houses."

"Why, father," exclaimed Lyra, "that is the way

it must have been always. The Indians never get through to the old settlements.”

“The British and Hessians do, though,” said her mother. “Oh, how I wish the war were over, so that Silas could come home!”

After all, it was not a bad thing for them to turn away from their own frontier and its enemies and talk about another. And as they talked, the real nature of the struggle of the American colonies for their independence came out clearer and clearer. The new country was not so much fighting itself free, as it was growing into freedom year after year. There were a great many statesmen, in America and in Europe, who did not at all understand it then, but old Ben Franklin was not one of them, and he had said, very plainly, that there was no use in trying to get a stout young fellow back into his baby-linen after he had become of age and had learned that he could handle a musket.

Not only the clear-headed lightning-tamer had said it, with many other good bits of common sense, but away off there on the edge of the wilderness the

inmates of the Warner homestead knew he had said it, and talked about him, for his name was as a household word, and they spoke of him as of one of the neighbors.

Very different was the tone in which they now and then mentioned Washington. They said Silas was "with him," and so were several other Plum Hollow boys who were somewhere in the Continental Army; through it all there was a curious idea manifested that the word Washington was only another name for the army and for the hopes of the young Republic. It was a pretty good name, too, only that it did not seem to include power enough to hold England at arm's length with one hand and keep down the Iroquois with the other.

For that gloomy Monday, at least, the storm was holding back the forces of Ta-yen-da-na-ga and Oundi-a-ga and the Johnsons. Runners could come and go, threading trails through dripping woods, or swimming swollen streams, or paddling their way over the roughened waters of lakes. Chiefs and warriors, however, were contented to sit in their wigwams and cabins, while their squaws pounded

corn, or worked new moccasins and leggings, or stitched beads and porcupine quills and feathers upon their own best cloth and deerskin. Some of them were adept dressmakers and turned out very artistic garments, but never, at any time, did a warrior of the Iroquois for one moment think of becoming a tailor. Not but what they could, and did, sometimes, do fairly well with a piece of leather after the squaws had tanned it, but that was only in a case of necessity, and the squaws could laugh at the clumsy work when it was done.

So the storm was a messenger of peace, and Plum Hollow and all the other settlements recovered from any scare they may have had. Before night there was a very complete specimen of the continual marvel of American frontier life, for the men, and even the women and the children, went about in their usual way, as if they had never heard of a scalping-knife.

The gunsmith had an advantage over many of his neighbors, for he could toil all day in his shop, every now and then squinting through the heavy barrel in his vise, or saying to himself:

“I know I’ve got the idea. I can beat Dan’s rifle. This one ’ll carry farther, if it does n’t shoot closer.”

Once he added: “But there must n’t be anything to shoot with left in this place. The redskins ’ll come again, sure as death, and when they do, it’s likely all we can protect ’ll be the house. I’d rather be in that than in the fort.”

Jacob went to the village in spite of the rain, but he could not get Dan to go with him.

“He ’s a kind of Indian,” said Jake as he went; “he’d ruther stay in the wigwam sech a day.”

At all events, Dan was more and more the hero of the village, and there were boys of his age who almost envied him the privilege he had had of a long schooling among the Onondagas, the best teachers of some things that any fellow could have.

Deeply hidden among the woods, not many miles from Warner’s bridge, was perhaps the most doleful picnic-party rained upon by that storm. There were no tents, but bark slabs were to be had abundantly, and several rude, low-built shelters had been made around a fire which was itself protected by other slabs. Not much rain got in between these to hiss

upon the fire, but not much warmth could get out. Still, a stick with deer-meat at the end of it could be poked through and grilled, and there was a getting of breakfast in a long, slow, dismal way. Under two of the shelters cowered braves who were evidently in bad condition, and they may have been those who tried to cross the bridge when the blunderbuss was on duty as a spring-gun with his mouth full of shot and slugs.

One large warrior sat in front of the fire, wrapped in his wet blanket, all his paint washed off, with his bare head bowed upon his hands. The entire scene, men, fire, and shelters, was blue and gloomy enough, for that was a baffled war-party. It was also a very good illustration of the manner in which the forces of the red men were frittered away in their long strife with the settlers. Three warriors had been killed and others wounded, without making any impression whatever upon the steady farm-line which, as Oun-di-a-ga and other chiefs declared, threatened to push forward and eat up all the Long House of the Iroquois.

Not only were they baffled, but a runner had

brought them tidings which compelled them to wait for the force which was to come, and it was rough weather to wait in. They would at least have plenty of time to consider the wonderful manner in which a pale-face war-party could conceal itself in the middle of a bridge.

There they sat, or lay, or walked dismally enough hither and thither, while the Plum Hollow people, in their comfortable homes, threw off their blues and grew chatty. It was a sort of reaction, and they moulded bullets, spun yarn, wove cloth, pared apples for sauce, cut up sausage-meat, or tinkered their shoes for the coming winter. All the while they told stories of the war and of the border, of fire and fight, of massacres and escapes, and the smaller children seemed disposed to keep near their mothers.

The rattle of Mrs. Warner's own loom was very steady, and when Jacob came back from the village he went to the barn at once to shell corn. Lyra sewed and then pared apples, and then she went into the front room and read aloud to Walter.

Everybody was busy in one way or another, and it was only when noon came and they all sat down

at table that they suddenly began to ask, in a surprised and anxious way:

“Where ’s Dan?”

No answer could be given, although there was much guess-work, and Polly declared:

“He kind o’ looked this mornin’ as ef he had an idee in his head. Looked like the Squire does sometimes when he ’s a-pesterin’ over a new gun.”

They could not so much as say at what time he had disappeared, and none of their guesses hit anywhere near the dripping tree behind which he was standing.

He was wet enough, but his boyish face was all lit up, and his eyes wore an angry, determined expression. He was peering out upon a wide, irregular clearing, partly occupied by long rows of cornstalks bowing in the wind. On the side near him, and not far away, were several heaps of ashes and of fire-blackened logs, to tell where a pretty prosperous home had been before the red men struck their sudden blow.

“Poor Bill!” he said. “All his hard work ’s wasted, but I ’m glad Mrs. Roberts and the children

were out nutting. I guess the redskins killed the hogs, but drove away the cattle and horses. The horses were shod, too. They 'd leave a trail I could follow. It 's just the right kind of day."

A roar of the tempest through the woods seemed to encourage and stimulate him, and he at once walked out to the ruins and looked carefully around, until his face brightened almost into a laugh, and he exclaimed:

"That 's it. They went northerly. I can find 'em. I 'll get 'em, too."

It was a day for horses, as well as human beings, to keep under some kind of roof; but there were three very good horses in that neighborhood who had no roof to go under. The long deerskin thongs by which they were fastened, so that they might nibble grass if they could find any, permitted them to huddle together and put their heads over each other's necks, and now and then to make sad, whinnying remarks about the weather, and about the absence of oats and hay and the accustomed attentions of Bill Roberts and his family. They had no reason to be pleased with their present human associates, al-

though they could see them, mistily, at no great distance, soaking around a dismal, bark-walled fire, or creeping into or out of sundry wretched bark-and-blanket shelters.

Very near them, just beyond a pair of uncomfortable cows, the one brave detailed as a cattle-guard cowered between the roots of a giant maple. He must have been depending mainly upon his ears, for the sodden blanket drawn over his head prevented his seeing, and he may have been thinking of his far-away Cayuga home. At all events, he was not thinking of or expecting a slight but intensely active-looking figure that was deftly slipping nearer and nearer, from bush to bush and from tree to tree. Still less was he, or any other member of that gloomy picnic-party, thinking of the long-range rifle which more than once was pointed toward them, with a finger on its trigger and a keen, dark eye glancing along its barrel.

“I must n’t shoot,” said Dan. “It would stir them up, so they ’d follow me. I could fetch him, though. No. Mother would n’t let me shoot, nor father, if they were here.”

He did much better, for he slipped on and on, keeping the animals between him and the camp and the sentry, until one of the horses, as he touched it, whinnied as if it knew he was no Indian.

The blanket came away from the head under the maple for a moment, but there was nothing to be seen, and it went back again. There was nothing to be heard, either, for the storm was a friend of Dan's, and it howled its best while he cut the thongs and set the horses free to follow him. That is, they slowly, ploddingly followed the one he led away, and the storm fairly shouted as they disappeared through the deep shadows of the woods. Before many minutes even the two cows thought they would take a walk, but a full quarter of an hour went by before there sprang up a loud whoop from between the roots of the maple, and it was answered by fiercer whoops from around the camp-fire.

There is nothing else so dear to a red warrior, nothing else to which he feels that he has so firm a right and title, as he has to the spoils of war. As soon as he has stolen a horse, for instance, the former owner's title has ceased.

Great, therefore, was the wrath when the impudent theft of those three Iroquois horses was discovered. The valuable beasts had been picketed within a hundred yards of the camp of their owners, but some daring brave of the pale-faces, some chief of note, had taken them. They could but admire such a feat as that, but its very daring made them wary. They wasted many minutes in discussing the chances of a pursuit, and they kept under cover while they did so. Once more, however, it was Kho-go-na-ga who discovered a faint print upon the soft earth and triumphantly exclaimed:

“Ugh! Little Foot come. Boy heap Onondaga!”

They read the footprint, but they also considered thoughtfully. Little Foot might not be alone. They might follow him into a neatly set ambushade, like that at the bridge, for the Plum Hollow men were cunning. They would indeed follow, but cautiously and not too far, and they more than half agreed with Kho-go-na-ga that Little Foot, with his high abilities and his Onondaga training, would probably become the head chief of the pale-faces.

The rest of that day was full of anxiety also at

the Warner homestead, for hour after hour went by without any word about Dan. He had not been seen in the village, and he was not out on the lake. The Squire worried in the shop; his wife worried at her loom; Walter fretted over his lame leg that kept him from going out to look around; and Lyra was at a front window when, just about dark, Jake took a lantern and went up the road toward the bridge.

“I could n’t do a thing,” muttered Jake, as he got there and held up the lantern. “It’s gettin’ awful dark.”

“Hullo!” seemed to come as an answer from the blackness on the other side of the creek. “Hold it up, Jake, so I can pick my way. I’ve got all three of Bill Roberts’s horses, and his cows are in the woods somewhere. I found ’em just outside o’ the redskin camp. I could n’t make out to bring the cows.”

“Bully!” shouted Jake, and then he growled in an undertone: “But if you do n’t beat anything I ever heard of!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WARNING.



AN VAN LENNEP was in a high state of jubilation over the success of his hunt for Bill Roberts's horses, but he did not seem able to see that he had done anything worthy of praise, except from Bill, for going out in such wet weather. When he and Jake got to the house the entire family, including York and the "garrison," made a tremendous fuss over him. He was put into dry clothing first, and then he was vigorously fed, with York sitting by, after he and Jacob had put the rescued quadrupeds in the barn. If ever horses tried to express gratification, they did, when they spoke to the Warner horses, whom they seemed to know. They said so much that they set York barking, and he went in to see Dan about it. He listened intently while Dan related all the particulars of his adventure, and Walter had just shud-

dered over the creeping in to set the horses loose at the camp of the red men, when Lyra exclaimed:

“Why, Dan, were n’t you afraid? Not a bit? They ’d have killed you in a minute.”

“I did think of that,” said Dan, “but the wind was making the biggest kind of racket, and I believed they would n’t hear anything just then. They whooped, though, pretty soon.”

“What if they ’d followed you?” asked Polly.

“I might have lost the horses,” he was compelled to admit.

That was all, and Mr. Prindle himself comprehended the curious fact that Dan had not felt one sensation of what is called “fear.” He remarked correctly:

“You have volunteered and accomplished an extraordinary achievement without exhibiting trepidation.”

“Done a ripping big thing,” added Jake, “and never quivered a hair.”

That was what all the Plum Hollow people said on Tuesday, as the story travelled around in the rain. The storm was not the storm it had been, but

was getting weak and gusty, and hardy settlers could venture out readily, to carry any news worth while. Bill Roberts heard it, and he came to look at his horses, and to laugh and chuckle over them.

He was not a talking man, but he looked from Dan to the horses and back again, and he remarked with energy:

“Should n’t wonder if you faound the caows and druv them hum, too. You ’re wuth ten o’ some kinds o’ men. Them critters hev got to stay here, but you kin hev any one on ’em. That there gray ’s a whooper to travel.”

“I ’ll take her, then,” said Dan, “if I want to borrow a horse.”

“Borrer!” exclaimed Bill. “Borrer a hoss o’ me! Risked your skelp for ’em, and borrer! Jemimy! If you like the gray she ’s your own hoss. If ’t was n’t for you I ’d be without Mattie and the children, let alone the hosses!”

“I do n’t know but what I may need a horse,” muttered Dan, looking down, for he was thinking again.

Everybody had plenty of time for thinking, that

Tuesday. Out-of-doors work was still out of the question, but toward night the clouds went drifting away from the sky and the sun came out. One of the first things he noticed was that the Skenauga and all the other creeks and rivers were very high and that all the paths and trails and roads were very soft. It was therefore a bad time for the rapid movement of troops, red or white. Jacob Dunbar probably translated a remark of Oun-di-a-ga, or some other red captain, when he declared to the Squire:

“This 'ere storm 'll keep the peace till the mud dries some and the freshets run aout.”

Nevertheless there were gatherings here and there in the western and northern woods, according to promises and plans, and as warrior after warrior, singly or in squads, tramped into the appointed places of rendezvous, the peril of the frontier grew darker hour by hour all that day.

There was a hard frost on the ground when Wednesday morning came, but as the day went on it grew almost balmy, and all the valley was peace and beauty once more. Walter could limp along a

little, remarking that his leg did not hurt him so much. Women came to visit with Mrs. Warner and to talk, or, as Jake put it, "They came to trade scares, and so they fetched along their knittin'." He and Dan husked corn all the forenoon, and they must have plotted something, for when he arose from the dinner-table he said:

"Mrs. Warner, anything you want 'tended to in the village? I 'm goin' in. Dan and I 've got a job on hand to-night, and I want to see Bill Roberts. Dan, you stay here till I get back."

"All right," said Dan. "Tell Bill we won't need any horse this time."

Everybody could see by his face rather than by Jake's that something was up, of a kind to arouse his expectations. His eyes were snapping a little, but before Jake could make any reply, if he had any to make, Mr. Prindle arose and exclaimed imperatively:

"Jacob Dunbar, there must not be any rash incursions by our troops into the acknowledged territory of the Six Nations."

"Their land does n't come to the Skenauga," re-

sponded Jake. "I do n't know jest where it does come to, but they must keep aout of our woods. I 'm goin' to make a sugar-bush over there next winter."

"I am aware that it was believed to be Delaware land," began the schoolmaster, but he was interrupted by :

"No, you dao n't, Prindle. That there aowl of yourn is n't any Delaware. He 's a full-blooded Mohawk. No Delaware aowl could eat up the hull of a spring chicken. Mrs. Warner, where 's your bundle? I 'm off."

"I shall patrol as far as the bridge myself," said Mr. Prindle, "but I shall not advance beyond that point."

"That 's right," said Jacob soothingly. "Do n't ye shoot any redskin unless he shoots first, or unless you see him tryin' to cross the bridge."

He was gone, and it was not long afterward that Lyra found that somehow she could not sit still in the house.

"Polly can stay there," she said to herself, "but I do n't believe she could if she did n't sing. Mother wants to spin or weave. I know she does. She

can't sit still and talk to those women, and I can't bear to have her look at me the way she does now and then."

She was walking all the while, and now, as she stood under an apple-tree and looked at the barns, a great hairy head rubbed against her hand.

"Come on, York," she said; "seems to me I want to look around everywhere. I want to see how everything looks. They say they burn everything they can set fire to. What do they do it for?"

She had played in and around those barns as long as she could remember, and now, as she drew near, the poultry came trooping around her just as usual—just as if there had been no owl in their barn nor any savages on any war-path.

"There 's the orchard too," she said; "but they would n't cut that down. Father says there was a Delaware orchard right here when his father bought the land of them. And the path over the hill from the back barnyard is an old Indian trail."

Perhaps Oun-di-a-ga, or some other red orator, could have told her that she had explained the matter pretty well. All the old Indian trails, centuries

old, leading to Iroquois orchards and cabins, were in danger of changing into the paths of pale-faced settlers, unless the change should be prevented by the tomahawks and scalping-knives that defended Ho-de-no-san-nee-ga, "The Land of the People of the Long House."

"How it all would burn!" she exclaimed, as she looked at the time-dried buildings and the ricks of hay and straw.

"Indeed it would," said a thoughtful voice behind her, and as she turned a question sprang to her lips: "Dan, were you there when your house was burned? Did you see it?"

Dark, dull, hopeless, and full of pain was the look that clouded his face.

"I do n't exactly know, Lyra," he said. "Yes, I saw our house on fire. It was a good while ago."

"Can't you remember about it?" she asked, as he paused and patted York.

"I remember some things," he said. "And then I'm kind o' glad I can't remember more. It was in the night. Just before morning."

“And they took you a prisoner? No, I do n't want you to try to tell me. I 'm sorry I asked. Mother said I must n't.

“Woof-oof-woof!” shouted York, looking toward the hill.

“O Dan,” she exclaimed, “somebody 's coming. It 's an Indian!”

“Down, York,” said Dan quietly. “He 's a friendly Indian—Oneida.”

He lifted a hand and beckoned, and Lyra held her breath, for the Indian who had suddenly emerged from the woods above the barns was coming swiftly, and York understood that Dan had welcomed him.

“Ugh!” he exclaimed, as he came within a dozen paces; and a look of surprised recognition was followed by words in the Indian tongue.

“Lyra,” said Dan, “it 's just as we supposed. They are getting ready for a great war-path.”

“Do you know him?”

“No, but he knows me. I 've seen him some time, I suppose. He can't stay but a minute. Go to the house.”

The moment she hurried away the red man began

to speak English, as well as he could, for Dan was not "up" in the Oneida dialect.

"Old gun man heap good friend," he said. "Know him long time. Tell him he mend Oneida chief knife. Mend hatchet. Fix gun. Give heap eat. Squaw give, too. Heap good Indian me. Tell him keep eye open. Oun-di-a-ga come. Ta-yen-da-na-ga come. Heap bad Indian come take hair. All Oneida keep away."

"Hope they will," said Dan, "but some of them won't."

"Heap bad Oneida," replied the visitor, and his Oneida name may have been a pretty long one, but he uttered it again and again.

Meantime Lyra had reached the house, dashing into the front room to exclaim:

"Mother, Dan 's at the barn, talking with an Indian. He knows him."

"Lyra!" almost screamed Mrs. Warner. "Oh, is n't there anybody to help him?"

"Now, Hannah," said the Squire, in a very steady way, "do n't be worried about Dan. Was he armed, Lyra?"

“Dan had his rifle——”

“No, no, was the Indian armed?”

“Why, no,” said Lyra. “I did n’t think of that. He had n’t any bow, nor gun.”

“That ’s all right, then. York ’s with Dan, too. He ’s safe enough. I won’t meddle.”

Dan was indeed safe enough, for York spoke to the Oneida in a very friendly way while he was telling his errand, and was rewarded by an admiring:

“Heap good dog. Ugh! Heap fight.”

He made it plain, however, that he had brought his warning at the risk of his life and must not come nearer the house, nor be seen by either friends or enemies. He shook hands with Dan and departed, remarking, with the dry humor common to nearly all Indians:

“Say to young squaw, she heap afraid. Plenty hair. Heap good Oneida come ’teal away young squaw. Put her in wigwam. Make her hoe corn.”

Dan laughed, but he had said all the thanks that were necessary, and as soon as his friend disappeared he hurried to the house to report.

The Squire sat still and seemed to be thinking, very much as was York sitting out by the barn, gazing at the place in the woods at which the old Indian trail vanished.

“Woof!” said York contentedly.

“I declare!” exclaimed the gunsmith when Dan ceased. “I remember him and his wife. Oneidas? Yes, it’s old Wau-ga-pum. That ’s as near as I could ever get to it. Oh yes, I helped him, but about the ‘good Indian me’ business——”

“I remember them,” interrupted Mrs. Warner. “I guess all the good Indian was Mrs. Wau-ga-pum.”

“Not the way they count it,” continued the Squire. “He ’s a great scalp-taker—been after them away down below the Ohio. Mostly Shawnees, I suppose—some Hurons and the like. But I would n’t answer for all the trophies there are in his wigwam. Glad he came, though. All the Oneidas are not out on this war-path.”

“Some of ’em will be,” said Dan, “and the Tories and the Canadians will be with the Iroquois. We sha’n’t be surprised this time.”

“They may not get in as far as this,” said Mrs. Warner, almost hopefully. “They never did before.”

“Anyhow,” replied her husband, “we must get ready. All the guns and ammunition in the shop must go to the fort to-morrow. Tools, too, mostly. I’ll work this afternoon.”

“Dan,” said Lyra anxiously, “did n’t Jacob say you and he were going out this evening? You do n’t mean to go into the woods?”

“Oh no,” said Dan. “Could n’t see anything in the woods. We do n’t mean to go far. Bill’s coming with us.”

His eyes said that he was quite willing to go right off, and so said another and very different lot of men, miles away. They were some dusky fellows who seemed, from remarks they made, to have had some horses stolen from them. They had been, also, upon a long tramp through the forest, and their plan of operations for the recovery of their lost property had only fairly begun when, a little after sunset, they all sat down to rest on the margin of a rude cove on the western side of Silver Lake. On the

ground beside them lay a bark canoe, of moderate size, which they had brought with them. It was ready to be launched, and they were evidently about to launch it, but at that moment a dripping shape scrambled up out of the water and held up both hands with a loud "Ugh!"

No words could have added anything to that assurance that something they expected to find there was missing, but the canoe on the shore was plunged into the water with angry haste, while a hoarse voice grumbled:

"Canoe gone? Ugh! Heap Little Foot."

He was right about the loss of the canoe they had hidden there, but the one they had was crowded with five on board, and so half a dozen warriors glided away among the trees. It was made plain that they had no purpose of cruising around on the lake. Not that it was considered imprudent for them to be there after dark, but that their real need of canoes was for ferryboats. They wished to get to the Plum Hollow side of the lake without encountering the sharp sentries whom they believed to be on the watch at Warner's bridge.

Jake and Bill and Dan had also preferred a canoe for the work they had laid out.

“It ’ll run three times as fast as a scow will,” said Jake. “We can patrol the hull length o’ the lake and keep along the other shore, where it ’s darkest.”

They were good paddlers, and their canoe was indeed an easy runner. The calm October night was by no means cold, and they talked to one another as if they were out upon a kind of night boating frolic.

It may have been pleasant to paddle up and down the lake, looking keenly out across the surface, with now and then a glance at the dim home lights of the village, or at the dull glow above the all-but-burnt-out watch-fire at the fort.

All was very still everywhere, and in the Warner homestead the quiet was so intense that it grew almost painful. More than an hour went by, in a kind of waiting, after Dan and Jake left the house, and then Squire Warner suddenly arose and took down his gun.

“Hannah,” he said, “I ’ve been thinking of Wau-ga-pum’s warning. I must go to the village——”

“And leave the house almost ungarrisoned?” exclaimed Mr. Prindle anxiously.

“No danger here,” replied the gunsmith.

“Abner,” said his wife, with an effort to speak courageously, “you go right along. Lyra and I and Walter can defend the house, and Mr. Prindle can stand sentry at the gate, or up at the bridge.”

Jake himself could hardly have suggested a better idea than that, and the Squire went off laughing, but he did not at first notice that York went with him. Far away, therefore, were the keen ears of the mastiff-bloodhound when a low, grating sound upon the gravelly beach below the mouth of the creek told that some craft or other had reached the shore. It paused only long enough to land four wild-looking passengers, and then it slipped away, almost invisible in the shadows, to the other side. More than one “Ugh!” greeted its arrival, and before many minutes there was a second landing of dusky passengers upon the eastern beach. They had avoided the dangerous bridge, and they had also escaped the very cheerful canoe-patrol, for one of them was saying to the others:

“I guess Plum Hollow is safe for to-night, boys. We ’ve got their canoe. The house is safe, anyhow.”

Perhaps it was, but Mr. Prindle had decided not to stand sentry at the gate. He deemed it better, and he said so, that the upper story should be used as a kind of watch-tower, from whose loop-holes the defender could look out upon the night and shoot at any assailing force.

“Do n’t shoot father when he comes home, nor York,” said Lyra.

“I shall never fire until I am fired upon,” was the dignified rejoinder, but the schoolmaster climbed the ladder as if something had offended him.

“Can they not understand,” he asked himself, “that the first object of the savages will be the capture of the roof? My post of duty is here! I will watch.”

He was not the only member of the family who felt like being watchful. Mrs. Warner herself went all around and examined the bars of doors and windows, and Walter made Polly and Lyra bring him all the spare guns, to make sure that they were properly loaded and primed. Polly laughed when

she saw how carefully he scraped the edges of the flints.

“You ’re bound they shall go off,” she said, “but I guess they won’t have to strike fire on powder to-night.”

“Guess not,” he said, and for some reason or other they all laughed.

Everything was very still. Even the canoe which had landed two loads of Indians lay all alone at the shore of the lake. There was not one sign of danger to be seen or heard in all Plum Hollow.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHIMNEY BAR.



HERE was much cleared land above and below the Warner barns. Only where the steep hillside forbade ploughing did the forest come down near them. Even there it had been left standing with a view to firewood and to "short hauling distance."

The barns themselves stood out, well separated, among the cattle-yards, and the several ricks were not too near each other, for the Squire had ideas concerning safety from fire. There was no light, that Wednesday night, strong enough to make a barn or a rick throw a shadow. All was so dim that only sharp eyes, near at hand, could have discerned several creeping, flitting, shadowy shapes, which came rapidly closer to the barns, the orchard, and the house.

“Ugh!” remarked one of them. “Heap dog gone. Kho-go-na-ga know what do.”

Other grunts answered him, as he called attention to the fact that smoke was rising from the front and rear chimneys of the house, but not from the very ample chimney in the middle.

“Wipe out old gun man,” he said. “Oun-di-a-ga heap fool. Burn when can.”

Enough was said to indicate that they were going ahead contrary to orders, which had bidden them not to alarm the settlers but to wait for the main attack. They were therefore neither Onondagas nor Mohawks, and their action illustrated the precise nature of Indian army discipline.

Inside the house everything was so very still that Mr. Prindle came down the ladder to see if anything was the matter. They might have gone off to the neighbors and left him to defend the house all alone. Perhaps if he had remained at his chosen post, with an ear toward the roof, he might have heard something worth while, but as it was he was just about to speak again to himself when Lyra whispered:

“Mother! Hark! Do n’t you hear that noise?”

“Hark! What is it?” exclaimed Mr. Prindle. “I heard it! My gun! I left it upstairs.”

“Hush-sh!” said Mrs. Warner, rising and taking a candle. “That sound comes from the middle room. The chimney!”

“There’s no fire there!” exclaimed Polly, but she at once darted through to the kitchen, while the schoolmaster went up the ladder like one born to climb.

Beyond a doubt, Kho-go-na-ga was a daring warrior, eager to win glory in the sight of the warriors already there, and from the whole Six Nations afterward. He believed, too, that he had carefully inspected the Warner place. He knew the chimneys. The absence of York indicated the absence of men also. A red burglar, coming down the wide flue into the unoccupied middle room, could unbar the side door and throw it open for the swift entry of a charging party from without. A more promising military plan was never outlined by any general, if all things had been as they seemed to be, or as he hoped.

It is, however, the unexpected that is apt to

happen, and the utterly unlooked-for came to pass in two places at once.

Mrs. Warner stooped in the fireplace and listened, and so did Lyra, while Walter worked his way to the shot-hole in the front door, gun in hand.

“I’ve three good guns here,” he said to himself. “Wish Dan was here, and the rest.”

There was a fine look of determination on his bright young face, but that of Mrs. Warner was very white when she whispered:

“I hear him! Lyra! The Indians have come!”

“I can shoot, and so can you,” began Lyra, but Polly almost shouted:

“Get out o’ the way, both of you!” and down into the fireplace she dashed a great shovelful of red embers from the kitchen fire. “There!” she said. “We’ll smoke him out.”

Over their heads Mr. Prindle had been pressing an excited ear against the cold chimney, declaring:

“He is in there! I hear him. But he can’t break through into this room. If he does, I’ll be justified——” Just then he heard Polly’s outcry, and a great idea of military genius flashed into his brilliant

brain. He darted to the top of the ladder and looked bravely down, shouting:

“Rosin, Polly, rosin!”

“What for?” asked Polly, but Lyra was quicker, for she dashed away, saying:

“I know where father keeps it,” and in a moment more she was throwing a handful of brownish-yellow crumbs upon the coals under that chimney, while Polly went with her shovel for more fire.

Thick and pungent was the smoke-cloud that went eddying up in spite of any Indian stoppage of the draught, and it was followed by what seemed to be a sound of coughing.

“Hark!” said Mrs. Warner. “That ’s just above the bar.”

“O mother,” said Lyra, “I ’m glad the bar ’s there! He can’t get down.”

“I think I will,” remarked Mr. Prindle over their heads. “There ’s somebody on the roof.”

Cough, cough, cough—an explosive, choking sound, that was evidently trying to climb out; but that was not the only noise that came to chill the blood of the startled garrison. Mr. Prindle had

stepped back into his room after his gun, and had even dared to poke the muzzle of it out at a shot-hole while he took one glance into the surrounding night.

Just then he heard a loud outcry at the barn, and he knew its military meaning. If his hair did not rise upon the scalp he knew to be in danger, his finger tightened upon the trigger, and in an instant he was kicked flat upon the floor, while a storm of leaden pellets went through the orchard, hunting for Iroquois and knocking down late apples.

There had been another mistake of haste made. A very young brave of the mighty Senecas had been too promptly busy with flint and steel at the smallest outside rick of Squire Warner's hay. Another, yet more hasty, had gone to the door of the old log barn and rashly torn it open. In an instant he and all the rest had learned that they had been watched and waited for and were now discovered, for a wild and startling whoop was hurled in the face of the astonished warrior. He caught, also, a glimpse of shining eyes and of something whitish, and as a second whoop followed the first he sprang back, so astounded that he at once uttered his own shrill war-cry

and was answered by all his comrades—by all but one in the mouth of a chimney and one just dropping from the eaves as silently as if he had been water from Cayuga Lake.

“Hear him cough,” said Lyra; but it was rather a strangling sound that now came down the chimney, and Mr. Prindle was not there to send up buckshot instead of rosin smoke.

“The door!” exclaimed Mrs. Warner. “They are coming!”

“Shoot, mother!” shouted Lyra. “I will, too!”

“Make ’em think we ’re all here,” called out Walter, as he let fly through the front-door shot-hole, and Mrs. Warner and Lyra were almost sure they saw something to fire at when they followed his example. The owl in the barn whooped valiantly again, but the brave at the hay-rick with the flint and steel had made only too good a beginning before he also whooped and ran away.

“He is coming through the roof,” exclaimed Mr. Prindle. “I’ll try and load before he can get in. I wish I were downstairs. This is the post of danger, but they need me most down there.”

It was no wonder that a Mohawk owl should hoot his best in such an hour of peril and excitement. The entire party of red adventurers seemed to have caught the whooping-cough, but the worst case was hastily slipping down the roof at the moment when a bright blaze danced up at the side of the outer hay-rick. The wind, what there was of it, was westerly, and the fire climbed the side of the stack and streamed away toward the woods.

“Mother,” exclaimed Lyra, peering out through a kitchen cranny, “they are setting the barns on fire.”

“That won’t burn the house,” said Polly, but Mrs. Warner exclaimed:

“Oh, if your father were here!”

“I ’m almost glad he is n’t,” said Lyra. “He can bring more men with him.”

Away out on the lake three paddlers in a canoe were slowly gliding along over the water, when one of them suddenly shouted:

“Jake, they ’ve got there! See that fire?”

“That ’s at the house,” replied Jake, with a setting of his teeth, but with hardly a change in the

tone of his voice. "Paddle now. We must go ashore at the upper end of the lake."

Down in the village a boy dashed past the sentry at the gate of the fort, shouting:

"Tell old Squire Warner his haouse is afire. Injins!"

"My wife! Lyra!" groaned the Squire, springing away from the squad of men he was talking with. "Not one man left in the house!"

They were all armed, and they all followed him, for even at that distance they believed they could faintly hear the war-whoops of the red men.

There were others in the village who at once dashed away toward their own homes, for this was worse than even the warning of the Oneida or the skirmishes in the woods. It was nearer than the burning of the Roberts place, and there were terrible heart-sinkings as eyes glanced northerly and saw the red light shoot up from the burning hay. Little could the startled settlers imagine how much war could be done by an owl, a schoolmaster, a wounded boy, a handful of rosin, and some brave-hearted women.

There seemed to be a tremendous propelling power in Jacob Dunbar's paddle, and more than once Dan thought he heard him groaning, or else he said:

“Polly! Lyra, too! Her mother!”

At all events, the canoe shot ahead as if by magic, for Bill Roberts was also a strong hand and Dan was doing his best.

Walter had rapidly charged the empty guns at the house, with one exception. That piece, in the hands of Mr. Prindle, was still frowning ferociously through the hole in the side door when a tremendous howl just under its muzzle announced that York's eyes had been the first in the village to take note of the fire-flash at Warner's. Perhaps it was as well for him that the gun-barrel was empty, for the trigger was pulled and a flash-in-the-pan explained that the schoolmaster had contented himself, for once, with liberal priming. He thus had balanced accounts with the powder-horn, for his previous charge had consumed nearly a double portion.

“Woof-oof! Ow-w!”

“Father is coming!” exclaimed Lyra. “Oh, how I wish Dan and Jake were with him!”

“What if he should meet the Indians?” said Mrs. Warner faintly.

There was little danger of that, recklessly as the horrified gunsmith was striding along the road, followed closely by his sturdy neighbors. Not one savage form had lingered within the glare of the hay bonfire, but a small procession of disappointed grunts divided in the road. The larger part sprang away in the direction of the bridge, but four of the defeated warriors turned toward the lake-shore where their canoe lay. They had done no more whooping after their first outburst, but there was no one to tell the garrison that its danger was over.

“Will all the barns go?” asked Mrs. Warner, just before York’s arrival.

“Now, Mrs. Warner,” shouted Walter cheerfully from the front room, “do n’t you know they can’t get through the doors, or the roof either, without chopping——”

“Or fire,” said Polly.

They all knew what that meant, and their hearts were beating fast. Small wonder if they were sinking a little.

There was something strangely hoarse in the voice of even hardy Jacob Dunbar out on the lake as just then he shouted, "Quick now, boys," and made the light craft under him cut a swifter furrow through the water.

"Jake," said Dan, "look! That blaze is n't growing. It's smaller. 'T is n't the house."

"Hope not," said Jake. "Those women!"

"Hark!" exclaimed Dan. "Watch ahead. Bill, take your gun. Oh dear, a rifle is n't worth a straw at night!"

"A smooth-bore is, though," said Jake, as he ceased his fierce paddling and picked up his gun.

"Steady," said Bill, working away. "That 's a canoe, sure 's you 're born. No use to shoot, yet. Too far."

Jake's bell-muzzle and Dan's rifle were peering over the prow as if searching for a mark, and one was there, if they could find it. It was only a minute or so out from the eastern shore, but the little lake was narrow there, and the crossing could be quickly made. The baffled red men felt sure that they would soon be safe, and they had really lost

nothing. Suddenly, "Ugh!" "Ugh!" "Ugh!" announced that they had discovered the unexpected presence of the other canoe, and they began to paddle desperately. Deeper and deeper grew their respect for the wonderfully watchful Plum Hollow men. This was worse than rosin smoke.

"They are going back for more," suggested Bill. "Look out now."

Loud rang the report of the big smooth-bore, and it was followed quickly by the sharp crack of Dan's rifle.

"Too far for you," said Dan.

"Let 'em know we 're here," replied Jake. "Keep 'em back. I can't guess what it all means. The fire 's going down."

"Can't hit anything," grumbled Dan, as he toiled at the slow process of reloading his wonderful gun.

There had been a disgusted chorus of "Ughs" in the other canoe, nevertheless, and now there followed another. The ragged bullet from the long-range rifle had indeed found no human mark, but it had struck the forward fastenings of the brittle birch-bark somewhat slantingly, and it had rudely broken

loose what Mr. Prindle might have described as "the entire and somewhat intricate formation." That is, the prow of that canoe yawned suddenly, and let in a gush of the cool, refreshing waves of Silver Lake.

"Ugh!" "Ugh!" "Ugh!" and there were other utterances, fast and furious, with no interpreter to translate, but it was well for that wild quartette that they were all good swimmers. To that could be added the fact that no gun or bow among them was now worth anything in whatever was yet to be fought of that naval battle.

"Dan," said Jake, "you hit something."

"Did n't hit any redskin," said Dan, "or there 'd have been a yell."

"But the canoe 's gone, somehow," said Bill. "I can't see it, can you? 'T is n't there now."

There was really nothing visible in the gloom beyond them.

"Shore, shore!" rasped Jake. "Our work is at the house. Quick! We may be in time. The women!"

And yet both he and Dan reloaded, with persistent coolness, before Bill's paddle sent that canoe

through some rushes to the beach. Just then the voice of the gunsmith over in the road shouted back to his friends:

“Hear York! He is n’t fighting. He’s asking to be let in. Oh, my wife! My girl!”

That was a terrible moment of suspense to him, no doubt, but so it was at the house.

“I’ll let York in,” said Lyra, beginning to unbar the door.

“By no means,” exclaimed Mr. Prindle. “You will admit the red marauders. Oh, do n’t!”

“That dog’s coming in,” said Mrs. Warner firmly. “They might kill him.”

“I entreat, I command——” began the school-master; but there his voice utterly failed him, in a choking gasp.

He had thought a bright thought, even as he fired his priming, and it had carried him to the fireplace before Lyra put her hands on the door-bar. He had blown the red embers vigorously, and just now, without taking away his wise head far enough, he had put on more rosin for whatever Indians might yet remain in that fatal chimney. So the first gen-

erous puff of smoke had disabled his speech, and before he could regain it York came bounding, yelping, rejoicing into the house he loved. He dashed around everywhere, speaking loudly to each in quick succession, even to the brave defender whom he found behind the door putting down a wad on top of the perilous rosin which he had now poured into his gun instead of wasting powder.

Slam went the door and up went the bars, while over beyond the bridge the forest rang with whoop after whoop, for the braves who had safely retreated by way of the bridge were notifying their comrades who had gone in the canoe but who were now in the water. These did not whoop, but they swam well, and they were all ashore at the moment when Dan said:

“Hark! Jake, hear that? York ’s in the house now. There is n’t anything the matter with him.”

“Thank God!” said Jacob. “But I want to know abaout that fire. Things are gettin’ pretty hot all ’raound the valley jest naow.”

“But that blaze has pretty much gone down, whatever it is,” remarked Bill.

“Hurrah!” shouted Jacob. “I know what that is. Hark, Bill!”

A man had paused, staggering, in the Warner gate at that moment, unable to so much as call out, and a clear, glad voice from the side door of the house had gone out to meet him, saying:

“Father! We are all safe!” and then another had followed, but it only said:

“Abner! Thank God!”

“They ’re all right,” said Bill Roberts out in the road. “I guess the redskins have got away. If that is n’t mean, now. I did n’t have any chance at ’em.”

“Come along,” replied Jake. “We ’ll go to see about the fire. Besides, we do n’t want to go into the haouse jest yet. The old man ’s jest got there. All I wanted was to hear ’em sing out.”

That was the very thing Polly Sackett was doing, and for her life she could not have told whether it was a hymn or something else; but there was a queer sound in Jake’s voice as he hurried along, remarking, “If that is n’t Polly! Bless her!”

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLACK TIDINGS.



THE best painter in the world would have failed if he had tried to paint the scene inside the log-house when Squire Warner entered. There was nothing noisy about it, but it seemed as if then, for the first time, they all knew what they had been through. It had been a genuine death-danger, and they had very narrowly escaped it—if they really had escaped, and if it were not still very close at hand, ready to come again.

The Squire heard about the Indian in the chimney as if he did not quite believe it, although the room still smelled strongly of burning rosin. Mrs. Warner did not say much, and Walter and Lyra and Polly did the talking—with some help from York; but Mr. Prindle showed more presence of mind than any of them, for he coolly and calmly proceeded to reload his gun. He began by taking out the wad.

and removing the rosin with which he before had charged it. He now substituted ordinary gunpowder, but left it safe from accidental explosion by omitting priming.

Out by the barns Jake stood and looked at the smouldering ashes of the hay-stack.

“Dan,” said he, “I guess some fool of a young brave did this. No great harm, but if there ’d been an easterly wind it ’d hev swep’ things.”

“Any old brave would have lit the big barn and the other stacks,” said Dan.

“Who? Hoo?” came mournfully from the log cage of the whooper who had whooped so effectively that night.

“Yes, old feller,” said Jake, “and the schoolmaster would ha’ lost ye.”

Bill Roberts and the men who had come with the Squire went away, but the Plum Hollow people were slow in going to sleep that night. One of the last to close his eyes was Mr. Prindle, and he could hardly have done so but for the feeling he expressed when he said to himself:

“It is every way much more satisfactory to me

to have that dog in the house. He would undoubtedly arouse me at once."

When the next morning came, however, about the first man to discover anything worth seeing was the man on guard duty at the fort. He was one fourth of the garrison, for all but a quartette had gone to their homes, ready to return at the first alarm, and also ready to bring their families with them. The storehouses in the wide enclosure were already well filled with valuables. The mill was choked with sacks of grain. The fort itself was prepared to do its duty, and so was the solitary rifleman who stalked around and shivered now and then, and called to mind the sentries in the camps of Washington's army.

At last, as he peered across the lakeside wood-pile, he saw, through the morning mist, something which riveted his attention, but it was long before he ventured an opinion as to what it might be.

"Ketched onto the dam," he remarked. "'Pears to be some like er canoe. Been sot loose and swep' daown. I'll take a boat and fetch it in."

So he did, and before many minutes he had tri-

umphantly towed ashore a first-rate specimen of what the redskins could do with birch-bark.

“That ’s it,” he said; “you can’t fool me. That there thing ’s been shot at. You might mend it up ag’in so ’t would hold water. A big bullet tore it aout lengthwise, at the for’ard cooperin’. Wonder if it made aout to draown any redskins? I do jest hope it draownded some on ’em, but they do n’t draown easy.”

He wondered much, and he said so repeatedly, what could have been the history of that canoe, and who could have fired the shot which had disabled it. Then he called the other three quarters of the garrison, and all four of them studied the matter in vain.

The Warner household was early astir, but Mr. Prindle arose in silence, for his first idea was that he heard something in the chimney, if not also a noise upon the roof.

Dan had from the first taken special charge of the Roberts horses, and it was a matter of course that he at once went out to see about them.

“They came by way of the lake,” he said, “and

so they were not thinking of the horses. Glad they did n't; but is n't that gray a pretty one!"

She was, and she had a look of speed, too, just as Bill had said, and Dan himself remarked: "I 'm glad she is n't any bigger. She just suits me. Guess the Squire can spare that saddle."

If a long line had been drawn from Plum Hollow so that it would cross the Hudson at West Point and then go on across country for about thirty miles, it could have been made to end in a front room of what had once been a farmhouse but was now an army headquarters.

In front of the door a sentry paced, horses were hitched, and a long line of tents and cabins could be seen across the road. In the room, early as it was, two men were standing, in the uniform of officers of the Continental Army.

"General Washington," said one of them earnestly, "can nothing be done? Must Wyoming be repeated? I am ready to mount and go. I could do something."

"Colonel Willet," replied the stern and stately Commander-in-chief, "I hear every cry from the border. I know, by experience, all that you can say

about redskin atrocities. But I cannot spare you now. I have done what I could. I have sent Major van Lennep to General van Rensselaer with orders to be on the alert at once. When I can, I will give you your opportunity."

On his face was the look of a man who cannot permit himself to have feelings, but the bronzed, hardy veteran of many hard fights who stood before him was evidently feeling deeply.

"Oh," he said, "for a chance to strike them! The frontier will reek with blood and fire until the Iroquois are broken."

"Broken they must be," replied Washington. "But you know what Howe and Clinton are doing. We cannot spare a man. What is worse——" He paused, and Colonel Willet finished it:

"It is terrible! We have not powder and ball enough to serve the army with twenty rounds per man—nor rations—nor anything."

"I hope Van Rensselaer will gather a force at once," replied Washington. "Brant and Johnson can gather theirs."

"They are gathered already, I 'm afraid," said

the colonel, as he slowly and sorrowfully walked out.

Hardly had he gone before the face of the Commander-in-chief changed, and he wrung his hands as if in pain.

“Wyoming over again?” he groaned, as he suddenly knelt down and bowed his head upon a chair.

All was silent for a minute, and he arose, for a knock was heard at the door. He had hardly time to say, “I trust not! God guard them! The women, the children——” and then, “Come in,” before an orderly entered with a despatch.

It was torn open, it was read, and he said to an officer who followed the orderly:

“Confirmation of previous despatches, Smallwood. The force that is harrying the Jerseys is about five thousand strong, British and Hessians. Read for yourself, General.”

No despatches could have told the awful story of the “harrying,” in the Jerseys and elsewhere, in the closing stages of the war for independence, after years of conflict had aroused and confirmed the bitterness and the revengeful spirit on both sides.

No tongue or pen could have depicted the horrors of the Indian raids, such as that into the Wyoming Valley.

Nevertheless, the red warriors who were at that hour hurrying to the appointed rendezvous to strike with Ta-yen-da-na-ga believed that they were about to act in self-defence and to avenge the injuries they had received from the white settlers. Moreover, every Tory who prepared to march with them considered himself a wronged man, striking back at those who had driven him from his home—the worst men on earth, rebels against their lawful king, fit only for destruction. The British generals on one side, and Washington on the other, preserved, in their immediate commands, something of the spirit and laws of civilized warfare. Outside of their limited range of control, it was indeed as if the lessons of the day had been mainly learned from the Iroquois and the Hurons.

Squire Warner kept to his intention of removing to the fort whatever arms, ammunition, and spare tools his shop had contained, but he could not remove his anvil or his forge, and he stood looking at

them, a little before noon, when Jake came in from the cornfield.

“It ’s abaout done,” said Jacob. “We ’ll go aout by and by and wagon it in. Pretty good crap, if the redskins do n’t burn it.”

“Guess they won’t,” replied the Squire. “They may not come at all. What I was thinking of is the horses and cattle.”

“Ef the redskins do come,” said Jake, “and ef we have any kind of warnin’, every hoof ort to go to the woods as far east as we can send ’em. One day’s drive ’d save ’em all. Indians come like hawks, but they never stay.”

“That ’s so,” said the gunsmith thoughtfully. “They ’d stick around the fort and the village, too; but I do n’t like that fort. If I was on the other side I could take it.”

“So could I,” said Jake. “I never saw how weak it is till jest now. All the men ’ll fight hard, though. Where ’s Dan?”

“Do n’t know,” said the gunsmith.

The same question was asked again after they went to the house, and everybody had to make

the same answer. Even Walter had no idea what had become of his friend, but he felt exceedingly cheerful over the rapid improvement of his wounded leg.

“Coming out all right,” he said. “So ’s the scratch on my side. I ain’t a bit sorry I was hit. Just a few days, now, and I ’ll be as well as ever.”

Sorry? That was hardly the way to put it. He had nothing else in all the world that he was so proud of as he was of the scores of those buckshot.

Jake went to the barn after dinner, and about the first remark he made was:

“Where ’s that gray? Bill gave her to Dan. That ’s it. Saddle and bridle gone. Now! If that do n’t beat me! Where ’s he gone? He ’s out after somethin’, naow! You bet!”

There was a commotion in the Warner family when that report went in, and even Polly declared positively:

“He has n’t gone a-huntin’ Indians, in the woods, on hossback?”

“He took his rifle with him,” added Lyra.

“Squire,” said Jacob, “for anything I can see

that Dan could do, he might about as well have taken a canoe as a hoss."

That might be, but Dan had decided in favor of the gray mare for some errand that he had in his busy young mind that morning. Without a word of consultation with anybody he had led the saddled and bridled gray out, through the back barnyard, into the cover of the woods and through them, for a mile or so before he came out by the road. Here he took down a length of rail fence and led the gray through. He put the fence up and mounted, and as he quietly cantered away toward the north he said to himself:

"They might have stopped me, or they might have sent somebody else. I'm going to do it myself. I do n't believe there 's any time to spare."

Whatever he meant by that, most of the Plum Hollow people seemed to partly agree with him, for they were all hard at work after the storm. The weather was beautiful; just the thing for corn gathering and for putting farm affairs to rights before the arrival of cold weather. To be sure, something was really done with reference to the possible

arrival of Indians, but it was all in a kind of unbelieving "guess-they-won't-come" style of talk and action.

Mr. Prindle performed his schoolhouse duties very much as usual that Thursday, and after school he went over and inspected the fort, remarking:

"A competent garrison could maintain this fortification undoubtedly, but I question its capacity for the protection of the entire population."

"That 's so," responded an old borderer who heard him. "I know what ye mean. They can't haul in the haouses. Them 'd hev to go, most likely."

All sorts of things went on about as usual, until later in the day a curious bit of news began to fly around from lip to lip and from house to house. All the boys carried it eagerly, and made the most of it, and every boy of them said:

"Oh, but do n't I wish I knew where Dan van Lennep has gone to! He 's up to something."

The older people would have let it go, perhaps, if any other boy or horse were missing, but there was a strong feeling among them that Dan's movements tallied, somehow, with those of the Iroquois. It

was a little as if he were a kind of friendly Onondaga. At all events, he was a mystery, and so was his going off alone in such a fashion as this.

“We really had not decided to surrender him to the aborigines,” declared Mr. Prindle. “He was under no necessity for escaping from our protection. The Six Nations have not repeated their demand for his rendition.”

“If you mean Bill Roberts’s hoss,” said a listener, “Bill give it to him for bringin’ of ’em back. The caows, they came acrost Warner’s bridge this very afternoon, and the Squire’s folks took ’em in and milked ’em.”

There was enough to talk about, therefore, around the blazing hearths of Plum Hollow that evening, but the night passed quietly for all the dogs but one. York had managed to keep his freedom, and he lost his night’s rest by it. He was gone a long time in the woods beyond the barn, and when he returned he was in low spirits. He had failed to find Dan.

The whole household sympathized with him next morning, and when Mr. Prindle reached the school-house, earlier than usual, he found a group of men

and women waiting at the door, and almost every boy and girl was already there, to hear what he would say when he was asked, by several voices at once:

“What about Dan? He has n’t been heard of, has he?”

“He has not,” responded the schoolmaster solemnly. “We have received no intelligible intimation of his whereabouts. There are no additional indications of probable hostilities——”

“No,” said Bill Roberts, “there ain’t no Injin sign, but I ’d like to know what has become of Dan.”

So they all said, but Friday went by, and the beautiful, lazy October haze seemed to settle into the people. So still it was, so dreamily peaceful, so utterly without any appearance of danger, perhaps even the fort would have been left to take care of itself, if it had not been for the one irritating uncertainty belonging to the fact that “Dan ought to have returned by this time.”

It was felt most deeply at the Warner place, of course, and it looked as if York was continually on the watch or wait for somebody he expected. He

was again disappointed, however, and so he was on Saturday, but the suspense about Dan grew painful by Sunday morning.

“He ’s a daring fellow,” remarked the Squire. “Too reckless altogether.”

“Is n’t it dreadful!” said Lyra. “I wish he ’d come home. He may have been killed!”

“Guess not,” said Jake emphatically. “No Injin alive could ketch that hoss. I wish I knew where he was, though.”

Only about half of the Hollow men took their guns to meeting with them that Sunday, although some of the boys made up for it by coming a little late and bringing the weapons. All went home after service, excepting a little squad that gathered at the fort for gossip rather than for consultation.

It was late in the afternoon when Lyra suddenly said to Polly:

“Why does n’t he come? Seems to me I can’t stay in the house.”

“You can’t fetch him,” replied Polly. but she followed Lyra to the gate, and Mrs. Warner joined them, and they all stood for a moment staring

up the road, just as if looking would hasten his return.

“Woo-oo-oof!” burst out a long, fierce bay behind them.

“Somebody ’s coming!” shouted Jake, as he sprang past into the road.

“Woo-oo-oof!” roared York, leaping the fence to follow Jake.

Beat—beat—beat—on the hard road, but not rapidly, came nearer and nearer the sound of galloping horse-hoofs.

“Not the gray! Not Dan!” shouted Jake.

“It ’s a woman!” screamed Polly.

“She ’s bareheaded!” gasped Mrs. Warner.
“Something awful has happened.”

“O mother!” was all Lyra could say.

Saddleless, bridleless was the bony black steed that came panting down the road, guided only by a rope halter and by the hand of a woman whose long white hair flew out on the south wind weirdly as she urged her failing horse.

“The Indians!” she hoarsely screeched, as she halted in front of the Warner gate. “They have

swept Cherry Valley! Men, women, children! Every house is burned. They are coming to Plum Hollow. I escaped alone, to tell you——”

It was Squire Warner's strong arms that caught her as she fell forward fainting, and Mrs. Warner was just behind him, exclaiming:

“It 's old Mrs. Bennett. There were three houses there full of her children and grandchildren. All gone!”

They carried her into the house, while Jacob hurried to saddle a horse and dash away through the village, shouting the black tidings:

“Cherry Valley is gone! Plum Hollow next! Brant and Johnson! Tories and Indians! All the tribes! They are coming! Coming!”

Faces whitened. Hearts beat hard. There were paroxysms of panic and sinkings of despair. It seemed as if the red spectre of the border were already in the valley, as if the dreaded war-whoop had been heard; and there were women who shrieked aloud as they caught up their children and prayed wildly to be spared the fate of Cherry Valley and Wyoming.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHERE 'S DAN?



HE news flew fast after Jacob set it a-going. Everywhere it found a kind of preparation already made, but it seemed to be none the less a shock. Cherry Valley was so near, and the Plum Hollow settlers knew the people upon whom this blow had fallen.

Horses and cattle were hurried away into the woods. Valuables were hidden in wells or buried in the earth. Pigs and poultry were turned loose to shift for themselves. Wagon-loads of women, children, and feeble folks set out quickly for the fort.

There was deadly fear and yet there was heroic courage, for this was a thing that all had been trained to think of.

“Mother,” said Lyra, when she returned from her first work after the tidings came, “I had to tie Nan-

nie to a tree out by the spring, or she 'd have followed me back."

"We 've sent Mrs. Bennett to the fort," said her mother hurriedly. "I almost think she is out of her mind."

"Squire," exclaimed Jacob, coming in at that moment, "where do you think I faound York when I rid back?"

"Do n't know. Where was he?"

"Aout at the bridge, lookin' across and waitin' to see who 'd come," laughed Jacob. "Wish he could handle a gun."

"Waiting for Dan," said Lyra. "Why does n't he come back?"

"Poor Dan!" responded Mrs. Warner. "Old Mrs. Bennett thinks they saw him ride through Cherry Valley the day he left us. He may have ridden right in among the redskins."

"Guess not," said Jake, "'t would n't be like him. Dan 'll come back."

The fort itself was a sight worth seeing. At first it seemed as if all who came brought their panic with them until there was a great deal of it, but

there is always a kind of courage belonging to numbers. Besides, there was really a very good display of guns, and the men who were to use them were full of pluck.

They were nothing at all to the boys, however, and every shot-hole in the palisade was peeped through abundantly, until the boys learned just what positions could be reached, if an Indian came within shooting distance. Nobody inspected more thoroughly than did Mr. Prindle.

He was inclined to think, at first, that his best post of duty might be in a scow well out upon the lake, to repel any advance of the enemy from the opposite shore; but that was upset by a cruel suggestion that the aborigines might bring their canoes with them.

“I have never had any experience of naval warfare,” he declared, and he turned his attention to the mills.

The saw-mill was a somewhat open structure, below the grist-mill, and was, as he said, “commanded by the more substantial fortress.” Even the latter, however, had serious defects, for while it had good

foundations and was built partly of stone, more of it was mere logs, and it had but two stories and an attic. Besides, it was crammed, jammed full of grain. Every bin was full, and the great piles of sacks obstructed his efforts to find a place from which he could point his gun at any warrior trying to creep across the roaring dam.

“There!” he said to himself at last, as he came out from behind a barrier of bagged wheat. “I think I have found an adequate citadel. I think it would be secure, un-un-less—unless the relentless barbarians should ruthlessly set the mill on fire.”

That was an awful thought, but they would have to capture the fort first, and the more he walked around among its defenders, the more he hoped that “any invader would recoil from the desperate resistance he would encounter.”

“They ’ll git licked,” remarked one of his own scholars, “see if they do n’t.”

The disaster at Cherry Valley had been awfully complete, but the mere squad, less than a score, of Continental soldiers who had perished, and the settlers who had fallen with them, had fought well

before they went down. Once more the red men had learned the bitter lesson of Oriskany, that the price of their desolations must be paid in dead and wounded warriors.

All the more furiously bitter was their determination to strike again, but even the Tories and Canadians were willing to move forward cautiously. So the rest of the day went by and night came on, and as yet there had been no sign of an enemy in Plum Hollow.

Darkness settled around the deserted homesteads, but there were blazing fires within the fort and out in the road at several places. Jake and the Squire lighted a large one in the road opposite the bridge and another half-way to the village, but Mr. Prindle could not account, upon military principles, for the conduct of Bill and Jake afterward. They crossed the lake in the canoe, and set fire to fallen trees at several points, not to speak of one immense dead hemlock that was yet standing.

“They do but guide the foemen to the village,” protested the schoolmaster. “It illuminates their stealthy advance.”

“They know where Plum Holler is,” said old Mr. Humphrey. “Jake says he could keep ’em off, if he could light fires enough.”

A clear night and a growing moon, with pretty good roads to travel in, seemed to favor the last great raid of the Iroquois. Never again were they to make such a rush upon the hated frontier that was threatening the Long House. Hour after hour they moved forward, in several detached bands, feeling their way with care and meeting no trace of opposition.

They knew the meaning of the village watchfires as they drew nearer, but those beyond the lake misled them. If the settlers had divided their forces, or if any help had come and was encamped on the western shore, then the village and the farms would be at their mercy. No Indians were thinking of coming in from the west. They were all on the village side of the Skenauga. They had no need for Warner’s bridge nor for the north road that passed the blacksmith shop. Their blow would be all the more crushing because given from an unlooked-for quarter. So they pressed

on, on, and their preparations seemed to them complete.

The children in the fort went to sleep, and so did many of the older people, at last. The fires burned low, excepting the watchfires within the palisade and in front of the main gate. Mr. Prindle rested well in his citadel of sacks, through which and the mill-wall neither bullet nor arrow could penetrate.

It was several hours after midnight when a woman slipped stealthily out of one of the houses in the fort and went to the gate and peered through, whispering:

“Did I hear anything? Why does n't he come? I cannot bear this!”

She had been followed, for another whisper, just behind her, exclaimed:

“Has n't father come yet? O mother!”

“Hush! Hark!” said Mrs. Warner. “It's almost daybreak.”

Up at the Warner place at that hour there was smoke pouring out of each chimney, and there were lights showing through the windows. A man was remarking:

“Time for us to go, Squire. The redskins won’t come by this way. Hear York? Come on. We’ll be needed at the fort.”

“If we can get there,” said the gunsmith, “and I guess we can.”

They passed out into the darkness as he spoke, and York at once turned and sent a long, mournful howl toward the eastern woods.

“That ’s it, is it?” said the Squire, and a loud voice over his head responded: ‘

“Who? Hoo? Who?” as a white, ghostly shape swept by toward the village.

“Jest so,” said Jake. “I left your coop open. Naow Prindle ’s lost ye, and you do n’t fly very well yet, neither.”

No Indians could be very near them, or York would have said so, but hardly were they in the road before the aspect of things began suddenly to change.

Over on the easterly slope flashes of kindling fires sprang swiftly up in a dozen places at once, as the rushing bands of red men lighted rick and barn and dwelling, whooping all the more furiously be-

cause they found no human victims, nor even quadrupeds.

“Hurry up, Jake,” said the Squire, “or they ’ll get to the village before we do.”

“Woof!” said York confidently.

“No, they won’t,” added Jake. “But I do wish I knew what had become of Dan.”

“Glad we made Walt Hawley go with the women,” said the Squire. But Mrs. Warner, at the gate of the fort, was trying to unbar it as she shouted:

“The Indians have come! Abner! Abner! I ’ll go after him!”

“No, you won’t, Hannah Warner,” said the nearest of several stalwart neighbors who came hurrying up. “We ’ll throw open the gate, though, so he can come right in when he gits here. That there yellin’ does n’t come from up your way.”

“No, it does n’t, mother,” said Lyra.

“Oh, but your father! What did he stay there for? Let the house and shop go.”

That was what he had done, after he and Jake and York had finished a kind of “outpost and picket duty,” and they were now coming along rap-

idly. York had actually arrived, wild with excitement, and ready to take at least his share in the defence of the fort.

“I ’ll do so,” remarked Mr. Prindle, as the shouts outside came in and stirred him up. “I will go out and reconnoitre. If the enemy are coming by way of the lake they may assail the mill first. I fear the hour of trial is approximating.”

There were children who cried and clung to their mothers, and there were women who sat down and wept bitterly, after looking out at the blazing homes they had fled from, but the general feeling was well expressed by old Mrs. Bennett, when she said:

“Oh, how thankful you ought to be that you was n’t surprised like Cherry Valley!”

Just behind Mrs. Warner stood somebody who did not say a word until the moment when Jacob Dunbar and the gunsmith came sturdily striding along, side by side, toward the gate.

Just then there sounded a burst of fierce whooping on the other side of the village, beyond the tavern, and Mr. Prindle, near the bonfire, exclaimed:

“They ought not to keep the gate open in the

presence of the enemy. I can't go and shut it myself. I 'm guarding the mill."

"Abner! Hurry!" shouted Mrs. Warner.

"Let'em whoop," growled Jacob savagely, looking back across the village; but Polly Sackett darted out right past Lyra and her mother and caught Jake by the arm.

"Do you come right in," she commanded him. "I 've been a'most dead! Jacob, dear, do come in! Won't you?"

"Why, Polly," he said soothingly, "yes, I 'll come in; but, my dear, I 've got to help fight, like anybody else."

"I did n't know that of them," half laughed Mrs. Warner, who had seized her husband, "but it 's the best thing in the world for Jacob, and for Polly, too."

"He 'll fight," replied the Squire. "Tell you what, Hannah, every man in this fort is fighting for his family."

"Except old Prindle," remarked Jake, as Polly led him in. "He 's even lost his aowl."

"Shet up, Jacob," said Polly. "This is n't any

time for your nonsense. You—you're not hurt at all, are you?"

"No fighting yet," he began, but a succession of sharp reports interrupted him, for there were marksmen at the loop-holes, and he finished with, "Let go, Polly. There they come!"

Come they did, but their leaders, red chiefs and white, were warriors of experience and prudence, and they had already discovered two important facts. One was that there was no surprise whatever, and they knew therefore that Plum Hollow had been warned. The other was that whoever built the fort had placed it in a first-rate position, so far as a daylight attack was concerned. Only the land side of it could be assailed at all, without boats or cannon.

There was a great deal in superior numbers, nevertheless, and perhaps there might be something done by terrific whooping and yelling. At all events, in the course of a few minutes it seemed as if there must be an industrious gunner behind every available shelter within gunshot of the palisades.

The women and children were hurried into the

houses and other shelters. Mr. Prindle gathered a large flock of small people in the grist-mill, and Jacob advised him :

“Open school right away. There won't one on 'em be late to call this mornin'.”

“They won't burn the village,” remarked the Squire, “so long as they need the houses to shoot from.”

“Ours 'll go, I suppose,” said Mrs. Warner, but she wore an almost contented look while she said it, looking at him and at Lyra.

The main body of the Iroquois and their allies was indeed blazing away at the fort, and there were signs of some kind of preparation for a closer attack, but smaller parties were roving hither and thither, on errands of plunder and destruction. Home after home was set on fire, and even long lines of rail fence were burning.

One pretty strong squad scouted along, stealthily, nearer and nearer to the Warner place, as if in doubt whether or not it were garrisoned, until, at last, it made a sudden rush, but not at once into the house. Every warrior of them pushed on into the

shop, and it was at once evident that most of them had been there before. A heavy hammer lay on the anvil, and a brawny, war-painted brave stepped forward and lifted it.

“Mend gun,” he said. “Make axe.”

Down it came upon the anvil, while the others examined the forge, bellows, vise, and other curiosities. They saw, with loudly expressed disgust, that other tools and all guns had been taken away, but the spot seemed to have a sort of fascination for them. They had a name for it, long and resonant, but which only meant “The place where the gun man bores a hole in a stick of iron.”

“No burn him,” said the chief at last. “Ta-yen-da-na-ga say leave shop. Old gun man good friend.”

It was as if the anvil, with the hammer lying on it, had been a kind of magic talisman; but this party had really illustrated very well one side of the nature of that remarkable civilized savage, dreaded by the American frontier as Joseph Brant, the merciless Mohawk chieftain. Even if he drove the settlers back to the Hudson, or tomahawked them all,

he wished to preserve shops and tools for future use.

Down at the fort the rattle of shots and the ceaseless yelling went on, with only now and then a lull.

“Some o’ their lead gets in at the loop-holes,” remarked the Squire. “Shoot quick and get away, boys.”

“Three of ’em have been scored some already,” said Bill Roberts. “There ’s nobody killed in the fort yet, though, and I guess I marked one redskin.” The fact was that both sides were keeping warily under cover, but this sort of thing could not go on long.

It was a little after midday when Jake, watching through a cranny for a chance to send a ball at something, suddenly drew back, remarking:

“That ’s it! I was afraid they ’d try it on.” Then he raised his voice and shouted: “Boys, they ’re going to try the hay trick! That ’s what they ’ve backed off for.”

Everybody seemed to know what he meant, and to understand, after they had looked out, why a high-piled wagon-load of hay was slowly pushing

up the road from the south. If it could be shoved to the gate, upset against it, and set on fire, a wide gap could be made in the wooden barrier of the palisades. Even the block-house might be burned, but it was an experiment full of risk for those who were to make it, and would probably be put off until dark. Then more than one wagon would be likely to follow the first. Precisely in this way other frontier forts and well-defended homes had fallen, time and again, where wagons and fuel were to be had.

“We ’ll do the best we can,” said the Squire; and they all talked bravely, but the evening shadows settled gloomily enough over Plum Hollow.

“I ’m afraid we ’ve seen the last of Dan,” remarked Jake, at about dark. “But I tell ye what, I can beat that hay trick. Now, you see ’f I do n’t.”

“Dan?” exclaimed the Squire. “I ’m afraid he ’s done for. I ’d forgotten all about him.”

“I had n’t, then,” said Jake. “Wish I knew where he was. But abaout the hay?”

“It’s a-coming now. They ’re moving the wagon

right along," suddenly exclaimed Bill from a shot-hole.

"Jake," said the Squire, "what was your notion 'bout that hay?"

"Hurrah, boys!" shouted Jake. "Get ready for it! Soon 's we know the spot it stops at, let her burn. We 'll set up a new palisade, 'raound behind that spot, while it 's a-burnin'." And then he added proudly, "It 's Polly's own idee."

The wagon rolled along, propelled by daring fellows whom it protected fairly well, but there was sharp firing from the loop-holes, and they did not try to shove it as far as the gate. A wide enough gap, anywhere, would serve the purposes of the proposed assault.

Over went the hay against the palisades, amid a rattle of fierce firing on both sides. In a moment more it began to blaze, but at that same instant the work inside began, under Jake's direction, with plenty of timber and dozens of vigorous workmen.

"Pitch in, boys!" he shouted. "There won't be a minute to spare."

He might well say so, for the hay burned hotly,

and the time-dried sticks of the palisades were kindling fast. The yelling and whooping was terrific, but it took on an angry tone a few minutes later. A second fire-wagon would have arrived and been set at work, but for a wind-blown spark that reached it. It ceased to be a danger, but stood and burned to ashes in the road, blocking the way, too, against a third engine of the same deadly kind. It must have been nearly midnight when Jake exclaimed:

“The palisades are going, boys, and we ain’t ready yet.”

Just then the smoke at the gap was blown away enough to show how wide it was and how easily the fort could be taken by a sudden rush.

“Work!” cried Jake, while all the hearts in the fort were beating more quickly, and a fiercer chorus of whoops sounded from without.

Then the whooping ceased, but the expected rush was not made. It would come, surely enough, as soon as the watching red men should perceive how frail and how unfinished was the new inner barrier, whose discovered presence had surprised and delayed them.

“Work, boys!” said Jake huskily. “This would n’t stop ’em, jest as it is, three minutes. Hullo! Hark! What ’s that?”

It seemed as if everybody stood still and listened, for another outburst of whooping could be heard, away up the north road. While they listened they looked, and there were burning brands enough in the gap to throw a strong light upon the defects of their last defence. There had been no time to set palisades, except at intervals, and against these they had spiked planks, piled lumber and cord-wood, but it was all only a little better than a breastwork, with several very weak places.

The boys had chuckled to think how it would astonish the redskins, and even the women had almost believed that it would do for a protection; but now there was small encouragement in hearing old Mr. Humphrey remark:

“It ’s better than a rail fence, boys, but they ’ll go right through it, and then——”

“It ’ll be worse than Cherry Valley,” came from one of the women, and quite a number of them were kneeling.

Louder, nearer, came the yelling from up the road, and now they could hear a clatter of quick hoofs and a rapid succession of shots.

“Somebody ’s coming!” burst from a score of startled voices, and one added:

“What? When we can’t open the gate to let him in?”

“Yes, we will,” began Jake, but the swift hoof-beats did not come to the gate.

They seemed to cease suddenly at the north end of the palisades, and in the fort there were groans:

“There! Oh! They ’ve got him!”

“He ’s gone, whoever he is!”

“Poor fellow! Who could it be?”

“Woo-oof!” shouted York, with a great bound toward the lake. “Woof!”

“It ’s Dan!” roared Jake. “They did n’t get him. I know what he ’s up to. The lake! Get into a boat! Quick!”

Quicker than anybody else had been Bill Roberts, under the loud-voiced guidance of York, but York was in the water before Bill could push off in the canoe.

Loud and fast rang the gunshots when the light-footed gray wheeled from the road toward the shore, but neither shot nor arrow touched her. The very whooping helped the impetus that sent her dashing into the water, and in another moment she and her rider were urging their desperate way around the shore end of the line of palisades.

She swam well, but it was a good thing that Bill was there, for several dark forms plunged in to follow. The foremost of them was lifting above the water a hand with a long knife in it, very close to Dan, when Bill's gun spoke sharply, and he said:

“That redskin 's done for. Stick on, Dan! Are you much hurt?”

“Arrow in my arm,” said Dan. “Catch the bridle! I must hold my rifle.”

There were shouts all along the shore, now, and a rain of shots from across the wood-pile drove back the other swimmers, while Jake, at the barrier before the gap, remarked:

“Anyhaow, it 's made 'em hold off a bit. They 'll make their rush pretty soon naow. All the men had best die right abaout here. No hope!”

There was a great cry behind him just then, for Dan said something as they lifted him from the gray, and all the fort could hear Squire Warner shout:

“Van Rensselaer’s men are coming!”

The hurrahs were frantic, and Dan was carried ashore as if he had been only a light parcel of good news.

“That was what the gray did,” proudly asserted Bill. “I knowed she had speed in her. But, hurrah for Dan! He went for ’em!”

“If they had caught him, though,” gravely suggested Mr. Prindle, “they could have tried him and condemned him as a spy, by the laws of war.”

“This way!” shouted Jake, from the barrier. “All hands this way. They ’re coming! It ’s our last chance, boys.”

So many had turned away to hear the news; so few were with him at his post.

“I ’m here, Jacob,” said Polly, in the shadow at his right. “I ’ve brought a gun, too.”

“God bless you!”

“Dan says they ’re pretty near now,” said Polly.

“He rode in ahead, so we would n't give up. Listen!”

The Iroquois chiefs and their allies had indeed been ready to make their dash into the fort, sure of success, when their scouts came racing down the road to tell them that a pale-face force of unknown strength was upon them. Its head was already this side of the old gun man's place.

Whoop answered whoop as the tidings spread, and the rush toward the fort held back. Then followed whoops of command from angry, disappointed chiefs. There was no panic among the red men, but the last raid of the Iroquois ended suddenly, in a wild, confused retreat to the cover of the forest.

“Jake,” said a voice he knew, “our men are 'most here.”

“I can't talk now, Dan,” replied Jake, in a choked, husky way. “'T was an awful close thing, but you 've done it.”

There was a great silence all over the fort, and again ever so many of the women, and even some men, were kneeling; but down the road came marching a firm and orderly column. It had no fight be-

fore it—only the wide, open gate of the fort. It halted at the gate, and a mounted officer who had ridden in front sprang to the earth, loudly enquiring:

“Where ’s Dan? Did he get in?”

“Where ’s Dan?” echoed Jake. “Why, here he is! They ’ve took the arrer out of his arm——”

“Dan van Lennep?” shouted the officer. “Hurrah! I knew it must be you, when they told me who came.”

“Uncle John!” was the first breathless gasp of Dan, as a pair of strong arms went around him, but he heard:

“I ’ll take you right home to your father and mother. Oh, won’t they——”

“Father? Mother?” said Dan faintly. “I thought they were—were——”

“No, Dan. Not one of them was hurt. Not even Reuben nor Sarah. You ran out to fight and got captured. We thought they ’d killed you. I ’ll tell you all the rest some day. Your mother——”

“O Major van Lennep,” exclaimed Mrs Warner, “I wish I were his mother, if it was only to have him come back.”

“Well, no, Polly,” Jake was just then saying, in a low voice. “That arrer-hole in his arm ain’t anything, but if he should get all the thanks that b’long to him, all at once, ’t would kill him, sure. You and he saved the fort, Polly. Tell you what, though, the valley folks have got to put in this winter mostly in house building.”

So they all said next morning, when the blackened ruins were ruefully inspected on farm after farm. One house, however, was unharmed, barns, shop, and all. In its front room, before the fire, sat a boy with his left arm in a sling and a large, loving-eyed dog’s head in his lap. A rifle lay on the floor at his feet, and he seemed to be thinking deeply.

“Well, no, Lyra,” he said, “I could n’t take York away with me, but I almost wish I could.”

“I ’m glad you can’t get away just yet,” said Lyra. “When your uncle went off with the troops he said he would n’t be back, perhaps, for a fortnight.”

“I ’ll be well by that time,” replied Dan, “but ’pears to me I can’t wait. He sent word to father and mother about me. They ’ll be waiting and expecting. Oh, I want to see mother!”

“I feel just as you do, Dan,” exclaimed Mrs. Warner. “Whenever I think of your mother it seems almost as if I did n’t want to have you here. I know how I felt myself when Silas came in, through the fort gate, behind your uncle. Then he had to go away.”

“But he ’s coming right back,” said Dan, “and he ’ll stay for a while, a good, long furlough——”

“I do n’t care,” interrupted Polly Sackett, “it was all wrong of your uncle to take off Jacob.”

“Only for this muster,” said Dan, “till we ’re sure the redskins went home.”

“I ought not to have let him go,” sighed Polly, “but he is so chuck full of fight.”

“Woof!” said York approvingly, as he looked up in Dan’s face, but he may not have been speaking of Jake.

“They won’t have any fighting,” said Dan; “but I tell you what, Mrs. Warner, I can’t bear to keep mother waiting, nor father, nor Sally and Reuben.”

“Mrs. Warner,” exclaimed an excited voice, coming in from the side door, “I have been there! I went with a guard. I have surveyed the ruins of

the schoolhouse. Only ashes remain. The excited savages wreaked their vengeance. There will be an enforced vacation, and all my pupils will lose——”

“Oh, thank God!” interrupted Mrs. Warner. “Not one family in Plum Hollow has lost either boy or girl! We might have been like Cherry Valley!”

“That 's so,” said Dan, “but we know now they did n't kill them all.”

“Ain't I glad you got away, Dan!” exclaimed Lyra. “You 've got to go home, but you 'll always belong to us. Father says so.”

“So do I,” replied Dan, with energy. “Some day or other I 'm coming back to live in Plum Hollow.”

It would be safe, thenceforth, for him or anybody else to do so, for the last raid of the Iroquois had been made and had ended. The Long House of the Six Nations was about to be taken by the white men, as Oun-di-a-ga had foreseen. Dan went home. Silas came to spend his furlough in the Warner homestead. Bill Roberts's house was built again, and so were all the others, including one that Jake said would be just the place for Polly to sing in. Another summer came, but before the corn again

ripened in Onondaga Valley all the Indian villages, the scattered cabins and wigwams, the great Council House itself, were in ashes; the Sacred Fire had been put out forever; and the League of the Six Nations had been broken by the angry frontiersmen who avenged Cherry Valley and Wyoming. It was on the morning of the second day after a column under Gansevoort dashed secretly and suddenly into the valley, past the lake of the salt springs, that a group of the invaders stood and looked at the still burning ruins of a village a few miles south of the ashes of the Council House.

“That was where they kept you, Dan?” asked one of them of a boyish-looking fellow with a rifle on his shoulder.

“Yes, Jake,” said Dan, “when I was an Onondaga, this is where I lived most of the time. I suppose it’ll be a great place for white boys one of these days. I know what I’m going to do! If the Indians are really going to be driven away, I’m going to have a farm of my own right here. It’s a better place than Plum Hollow.”

(13)

THE END.



